

Performing Dumas. Architecture and Mise en Scène at the Château de Monte-Cristo

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Abstract

When Alexandre Dumas père was at the peak of his success and popularity, he was personally involved in the design and construction of the Château de Monte-Cristo (Port-Marly, France, 1847). The architectural and ornamental features of this lavish abode can be interpreted as a reflection of Dumas' literary ambition, as a complex aesthetic portrait. Dumas' mise en scène of his whole life as artwork prompted him to create an elaborate display of visual rhetoric, an interplay of images and words developed through a physical and allegorical relationship with a place now appropriated by and absorbed into his persona. It is essential, therefore, that information on Dumas' life and literary career may be combined with an iconographic analysis as a means of decoding the meanings bound up in the spectacle buildings at the Château de Monte-Cristo.

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The curtain rises ... and then falls

Finally, we find ourselves before the château of Alexandre Dumas, a Monte Cristo no less famous than the novel to which it owes its name.¹

Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris. Marly-Le-Roy", in: *Musée des familles. Lectures du soir* 11 (August 1847), 335.

[1] The most productive period of Alexandre Dumas' literary career, spanning the years 1843 to 1847, was undoubtedly the peak of his success and popularity. It was at this time that Dumas also promoted and became personally involved in the design of two buildings envisaged as stages upon

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the final version of this paper, including French texts, was translated by James Calder (freelance translator). The author also wishes to recognise digital resources on Alexandre Dumas held by Gallica (BNF) and especially the Société des Amis d'Alexandre Dumas (www.dumaspere.com).

which his dreams could be acted out: the Théâtre-Historique on the Boulevard du Temple in Paris, and the Château de Monte-Cristo, in nearby Port-Marly, Yvelines, both of which were completed in 1847. Though built for different purposes, they were both conceived as spectacle buildings, the former a manifestation of Dumas' commitment to the revival of French theatre and the latter proclaiming the foundations and hallmarks of his own literary glory. Having reached the pinnacle of his career, Dumas decided to use stone as an alternative means of communication to pen and paper, his purpose in doing so to astonish the audience with new works of art designed to reflect and project his personality.

[2] Dumas' literary success and the financial security it brought him gave him the means to pursue his unusual interest in architecture, as a developer and even a co-designer. Material wealth presented the writer with an opportunity to derive pleasure from buildings he could feel were his own, something previously of no concern to him. Especially prominent in this new pursuit was the Château de Monte-Cristo, which in its capacity as his new place of private residence was inevitably more closely identified with its owner than the theatre space. In fact, as a means of projecting his subjective self, this luxurious and eclectic abode may be regarded in its near-indexical relationship to Dumas' persona as a discursive tool for analysing strategies of expression and remembrance, an approach pursued by Harald Hendrix in his study of houses designed by writers who then lived in them.² In accordance with Hendrix's line of argument, the architectural and ornamental features designed for the Château de Monte-Cristo can be primarily interpreted as a reflection of Dumas' literary ambition, as a complex aesthetic portrait. Although other narratives may be detected here, ranging from the self-regarding material expression of his individuality and uniqueness, to the desire to construct a creative haven, or the nostalgia-tinged evocation of his forebears, his entire contribution is underpinned by a manifest and ambitious desire to explore and draw on new and alternative means of expression to complement his literary work.

[3] Viewed as a whole, Dumas' involvement in the design and construction of the Château de Monte-Cristo can be seen as a response to an inner desire to explain certain key characteristics of his personality, particularly those most closely linked to his creative work as an artist. It is for that reason that the building should be interpreted as a portrait, one that is undoubtedly narcissistic in nature, as its outward appearance is noticeably bound to the folds of the various historic and artistic adornments that support it. At a time of personal success and security, Dumas' interpretation of his whole life as art prompted him to create an elaborate display of visual rhetoric, an

² The pursuit of artistic expression, as engaged in by writers who became personally involved in the architectural design and decoration of their residences, led in many cases to the construction of houses fashioned from dreams and unmistakably intended as monuments to their owners. Harald Hendrix, ed., *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, New York 2008, 1-11.

interplay of images and words developed through a physical and allegorical relationship with a place now appropriated by and absorbed into his persona. It is essential, therefore, that information on Dumas' life and literary career may be combined with an iconographic analysis as a means of decoding the meanings bound up in this extraordinary abode,³ a place destined to pass into posterity as an interface for presenting himself to his public, just as the author had intended.

Prologue

[4] Both the origins and the design of the Château de Monte-Cristo are inextricably linked to the resounding success Dumas enjoyed with his serialised *feuilletons* in 1844, starting with *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, which first appeared in series form in *Le Siècle* on 14 March, and then with *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, published in the *Journal des Débats* from 28 August onwards. Overcome by the frantic pace of his work and his hectic social life, at the end of May that very same year Dumas beat a retreat from Paris to the nearby village of Saint-Germain-en-Laye,⁴ his idea being to rest for a short period of time. He stayed initially at the Pavillon Henri IV and

³ We are indebted in this regard to Georges Poisson, who first approached the connection between the houses of writers and their personalities by considering their theatrical elements and their scope as portraits. Georges Poisson, *Monte-Cristo, un château de roman*, Marly-le-Roi 1987; George Poisson, *Les maisons d'écrivain*, Paris 1997, 74-80. Other considerations are put forward by Christiane Neave and Hubert Charron, *Monte-Cristo, château de rêve*, Marly-le-Roy 1994; Michel Cazenave, *Alexandre Dumas, le château des folies*, Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire 2002; and most importantly by Claude Schopp in his exhaustive biography, *Alexandre Dumas, le génie de la vie*, Paris 2002, 392-409. The present paper was submitted to RIHA Journal on 7 June 2013. The publication of new documents, particularly upcoming and eagerly awaited volumes containing a copious amount of correspondence by Dumas - *Correspondance générale* published by Claude Schopp, correspondence that until now is limited to the years 1820-1832 and 1833-1838 (volumes I and II, Paris 2014 and 2016) -, should shed more light on details such as the relationships between Dumas and the architects and artists who worked on Port-Marly.

⁴ It was at this time, during which Dumas and his wife Ida Ferrier grew apart, that Dumas' friend Gérard de Nerval spoke to him of the benefits of using Saint-Germain-en-Laye as a convenient retreat from the turmoil of Paris – among them the short train journey. Such advice played a decisive part in the shaping of the project for the creation of Dumas' very own *château*. Nor was Dumas' choice of retreat without personal coincidence: his grandfather, the marquis Alexandre-Antoine Davy de la Pailleterie, passed away there in 1786. The author's most important biographers concur on these details: Alexander C. Bell, *Alexandre Dumas. A Biography and Study*, London 1950, 178-179 and 207-209; Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 369-375; Schopp, "Saint-Germain-en-Laye et Port-Marly. Alexandre Dumas: instantanés d'une vie de château", in: *Sur les pas des écrivains. Balade en Yvelines*, ed. Marie-Noëlle Craissati, Paris 2001, 147-153.

befriended the chef Jean-Louis-François Collinet, who ran the hotel and restaurant there and who would help him rent the Villa Médicis two months later. It was during his stay at the Pavillon Henri IV, on the afternoon of 16 June to be precise, that the idea of building a house for himself first took root. Returning from a walk to Versailles, his eyes lighted on a small wooded hill overlooking the Seine at Port-Marly, a spot known as Montferrands and a propitious location for a country house.⁵

[5] Acting on Collinet's advice, Dumas discussed his nascent plans with the developer and master builder Barthélémy Planté, who was living in Saint-Germain-en-Laye at the time.⁶ Working together on an initial draft for a one-storey house comprising an entrance hall, a living room, a study and two ensuite bedrooms, with the kitchen and wine cellars situated in the basement, Planté and Dumas drew up extended new plans.⁷ The addition of a main floor on which the writer could shut himself away revealed his desire to make the house more comfortable. However, his inclination for the mundane does not seem to have manifested itself in his initial plans, Dumas instead prioritising the creation of a place where he could take refuge and concentrate on his work.

[6] With typical determination and vigour, he began acquiring the first plots of land that summer, investing in them the huge sums of money generated by his successful *feuilletons*. Such were the possibilities offered by the location that plans were extended even as the property began to take shape, the little country house he had originally intended to build eventually growing in size to become the Château de Monte-Cristo. It comprised two separate buildings – one in which to live and another in which to work (figs.

⁵ The circumstances of how Dumas came to his decision are described in: "Monte-Cristo", in: *L'Illustration* 261 (26 February 1848), 407-411; Charles Barthélemy, "Hors Paris. Monte-Cristo", in: *La Semaine des Familles* 7 (17 May 1879), 104-106; Blaze de Bury, *Alexandre Dumas, sa vie, son temps, son oeuvre*, Paris 1885, 224-227. Poisson offers more in the way of detail in Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 7-17.

⁶ Planté was also the building contractor for a housing development known as Cité Médicis, a project begun in 1832 by Émile Péreire, the president of the Paris/Saint-Germain railway line and the owner of the Pavillon Henri IV and its grounds. As well as being mentioned in the aforementioned article in *L'Illustration*, Planté was incorrectly named by Bell as the architect responsible for designing the Château de Monte-Cristo: Bell, *Alexandre Dumas*, 209.

⁷ According to the article published in *L'Illustration*, Dumas set to work on the day after their first meeting: "He took a large sheet of paper, a pencil and a ruler, and set about drawing the plans for his house"; see "Monte-Cristo", 410. Charles Barthélemy has attributed this anonymous text to either Dumas himself or a close friend, which would explain why the account provided is so accurate: Barthélemy, "Hors Paris. Monte-Cristo", 105.

1 and 2) – and a park *à l'anglaise* for his beloved menagerie, where he sought to recreate a sort of Paradise.⁸



1 P.B., *Château de Monte-Cristo, Port-Marly*. Engraving from: *L'Illustration*, 26 February 1848, 408



2 P.B., *Châtelet or Château d'If, Port-Marly*. Engraving from: *L'Illustration*, 26 February 1848, 409

⁸ A complete list of all Dumas' pets and exotic animals, including dogs, monkeys, cats, parrots, a cock, a pheasant and a vulture called Diogène, is provided in *Histoire de mes bêtes*. Dumas said of his menagerie: "I love the solitude of earthly paradise, a solitude inhabited by animals. [...] And there in my solitude at Monte-Cristo, lacking both Adam's ingenuity and his garb, I had my own little Garden of Eden." Alexandre Dumas, *Histoire de mes bêtes*, Paris 1868, 12-14.

[7] During its construction, Dumas was comfortably installed at the Villa Médicis, located on Rue de Boulingrin in Saint-Germain. His sojourn there may well have influenced his change of plans, as it allowed him to contemplate the beneficial effect that a house with a garden might have on his work.⁹ In fact, the aforementioned division of the property at Port-Marly into two separate buildings can be viewed as an enhanced replica of the layout of the Villa Médicis, which possessed a small pavilion or summer house, a favoured spot for writing in summertime: "All I need is my little stained-glass pavilion, against the wall of which I have placed a table, and which I use as a study in summer."¹⁰ It is likely that the satisfaction he derived from taking refuge in such a space revived in Dumas some fond memories, such as recollections of the remote study to which his relative Jean-Michel Deviolaine would often retreat, or of Charles Nodier's apartment in the Arsenal Library, the setting for many famous soirées attended by Dumas and the emerging generation of Romantic writers.¹¹

[8] Dumas was undoubtedly familiar with the topic of literary *ermitages*, an established tradition that dated back to the 18th century, at which time it was mainly associated with prestigious French writers.¹² However, in projecting his recently acquired status as a successful writer, he chose to imitate other models of greater artistic ambition, ranging from Sir Walter

⁹ Dumas may well have pondered this very question during his stay in 1840 at the Palazzo Larderel in Florence (which he referred to as the Palazzo Lagestverde in his memoirs), which itself has a garden. Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 339 and 387. As regards the reasons for his decision to build a *château* instead of a country house, these are discussed by Christiane Neave and Hubert Charron in one of the first papers to be written on Monte-Cristo: Neave and Charron, *Monte-Cristo*, 7. The key underlying factors in Dumas' decision to abandon his original plan, a change motivated by his ambition and dreams, was earlier addressed by Barthélemy, "Hors Paris. Monte-Cristo", 104; and Théodore Gosselin, "Alexandre Dumas. Nos gravures", in: *Le monde illustré. Journal hebdomadaire* 1389 (10 November 1883), 294.

¹⁰ Dumas, *Histoire de mes bêtes*, 74. Another reference to this "petit kiosque à verres de couleur", where he wrote *Le bâtard de Mauléon*, can be found in the same book on page 191.

¹¹ Mr Deviolaine's house in Villers-Cotterêts had a "delightful garden that was half English and half French". Dumas never forgot the cascades and pools that adorned the English section of Deviolaine's garden and recreated them in his own way in his park at Port-Marly. Alexandre Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, Paris 1863, 237-238. Dumas' presence at Nodier's parties from 1829, coinciding with his first theatre successes, are referred to by Vincent Laisney, *L'arsenal romantique: le salon de Charles Nodier (1824-1834)*, Paris 2002, 325-339; and Daniel Sangsue, "Rêves de gloire: portrait de l'écrivain en héros de roman (sur la célébration de Nodier par Dumas)", in: *Recherches et Travaux* 47 (1995), 63-78.

Scott's manor house at Abbotsford¹³ to the excessive and near scandalous luxury of the Parisian houses owned by the dandy Eugène Sue, who by that time had come to embody the most successful *romancier-feuilletoniste*.¹⁴ That said, Dumas' approximation of a *château*, which is the title he decided to give his Monte-Cristo residence, possessed a certain sense of irony. As opposed to the great mansion Scott chose to build, Dumas opted for two buildings that were relatively small in size but which offered a clear contrast in terms of style: a main residence that was Renaissance in inspiration, and a modest pavilion to which he would retire to write and which was Gothic in influence. Despite this difference, each building is known as a *château*, a

¹² In response to the Rousseauian doctrine of the return to nature, country ermitages became all the rage in private gardens. Rousseau even availed himself of them on occasion, staying at a house lent to him by Madame d'Épinay in the forest of her château in Montmorency (Château de La Chevrette), and at a pavilion next to the Château d'Ermenonville, where he spent his last days: José Cabanis and Georges Herscher, eds., *Jardins d'écrivains*, Arles 2002, 46-51; Sylvain Menant, "Maisons d'écrivain et histoire littéraire", in: *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 109 (2009), no. 4: *Les maisons d'écrivain*, 771-781. A number of treatises were written on this branch of landscape-garden architecture, reflecting its popularity. These included William Wright's *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement Consisting of Plans, Elevations, and Sections, for Huts, Retreats, Hermitages, Grottos, Moresque Pavilions, Green Houses ...*, London 1767; or John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening, Comprising the Theory and Practice or Horticulture, Floriculture, Arboriculture, and Landscape-Gardening...*, London 1822, esp. Part II, Book III.

¹³ Scott, as Dumas himself recognised, was one of his most crucial literary influences at the beginning of his writing career: Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CCLIII. Dumas admired the faithful way in which Scott reconstructed history in his novels, and it is evident that in terms of their lifestyles both were astute propagandists when it came to projecting themselves through the careful design of their houses, a trait discussed in detail by Bell: "Monte-Cristo was to Dumas what Abbotsford had been to Walter Scott. There is no doubt that Dumas, looked upon by his contemporaries and by himself as Scott's successor, was moved by vanity to this grandiose imitation of the great historical romancer he so much admired – an imitation which was to cost him dear." Bell, *Alexandre Dumas*, 219. On the inspiration of the Middle Ages and, above all, on the appropriation of authentic historical pieces, in conjunction with replicas, at Abbotsford see Peter D. Garside, "Scott, the Romantic Past and the Nineteenth Century", in: *The Review of English Studies* 90 (May 1972), 147-161; Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France*, Cambridge 1984, 93-111; and Iain G. Brown, *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott: The Image and the Influence*, Edinburgh 2003.

¹⁴ Dumas mentions his friend Sue several times in his memoirs, and even devotes whole chapters to retelling his life story, in which he fails to conceal the fact he was dazzled by Sue's success: Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapters CCLXI-CCLXIII. Dumas visited the luxurious houses on the Parisian streets of La Ferme-des-Mathurins and

term deeply ingrained in Dumas' childhood memories and redolent of literary allusions.¹⁵ The explanation for this functional split lies in Dumas' desire to combine, without one interfering with the other, two different aspects of his lifestyle: his life as a writer, for which he needed a refuge where he could shut himself away; and his life as a *bon vivant*, for which he required a place for throwing parties and hosting banquets for his friends.

[9] The decision to build a *château* would appear to tie in with the Gothic revival in France. The increasing popularity Gothic art had enjoyed since the Bourbon Restoration was preceded and ushered in by the so-called *troubadour* style, a nostalgia-tinged development that grew out of the literature of the 1780s and spread from 1800 onwards into the visual arts, with subject matter and characters appearing in settings ranging from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.¹⁶ However, in the case of Dumas, the revival of the *château* theme suggests a more obvious debt to the picturesque aesthetic and the garden as a scenery, given that Gothic-inspired buildings designed as garden adornments or follies began cropping up throughout Europe in the early years of the 19th century.¹⁷ It is here that the first of several influences can be detected in the process that led to Dumas building his place of refuge and literary creation, presented more as a garden pavilion than as a genuine *château*. Staying faithful to this picturesque approach, which, as we shall see at a later stage, also extended to the eclecticism of the residential building, Dumas divested the Château de Monte-Cristo of all political connotations by avoiding styles and types of

La Pépinière and was full of praise for Sue's artistic taste, which paved the way for new trends in interior design by combining antiques and styles (ranging from the Renaissance to the Louis XV style, for example) and also paying tribute to the influence of the Orient. Dumas would follow such trends himself at Port-Marly, as evidenced by his use of antique furniture and the wonderful *chambre mauresque*: "[Sue] was the first to furnish an apartment in the modern style. He was the first to have all those delightful ornaments and accoutrements that nobody wanted at the time and which then became all the rage: stained glass, porcelain pieces from China and Saxony, Renaissance sideboards, Turkish sabres, Malay daggers, etc." Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CCLXIII. However, his contemporaries were very critical of Sue's lifestyle, which contradicted his socialist ideas, as Eugène de Mirecourt stressed in *Les contemporains*. Eugène Sue, Paris 1859.

¹⁵ His first childhood memories were linked to the Château des Fossés, a small castle his family moved to not long after his birth: Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter XVI. Though Dumas recalled little about the inside of the building, he had very clear recollections of the water-filled moat surrounding it. In addition to its asymmetric shape, Dumas may well have transposed this image on the Neo-Gothic building, which he would call the Château d'If, as will be discussed at a later stage. The names Monte-Cristo and If allude directly to one of his most famous novels, *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* (1844-1846). In particular, If evokes the Marseille fortress in which Dumas' hero Edmond Dantès was imprisoned, a reference to France's past and another of the means by which Dumas attempted to forge links between his buildings at Port-Marly and the settings found in his literary works.

architecture that could be associated in some way with the manifestation of power. In doing so he distanced it from the buildings that had been constructed in France from 1815, which reflected the conservative morals associated with the restoration of the monarchy, and then from 1830, erected to encapsulate the legitimist aspirations and feudal yearnings of nobles who had retired to the country during the reign of Louis-Philippe.¹⁸

[10] Putting political meanings to one side, Dumas' devotion to the English Gothic novel, from which he took some of his most recurring themes, such as the haunted castle, seem to have played a more significant part in this decision. Although the future Château de Monte-Cristo should be regarded as a welcoming castle, it also has fictional connotations due to its location in the middle of a wood, to its being hidden away in a remote and largely inaccessible place shrouded in mystery, an impression that is merely heightened by the dazzling way in which it presents itself to visitors.¹⁹ With regard to these literary motifs, it is interesting to note that Dumas deployed the selfsame typological and functional duality of a main fortified dwelling and a garden pavilion in one of his earliest novels, *Pauline* (1838). Here the eponymous protagonist finds a "pavillon isolé" amid an oak wood in a park

¹⁶ The spread of the *troubadour* or Gothic *troubadour* style as an alternative means of escaping to the past, a retrospective fad born out of an attraction to the so-called *bon vieux temps* (good old days), served a transitional purpose in the development of Romanticism, which manifested itself in the discovery of medieval poetry, the recreation of scenes from French history and the restoration of the knightly society. These all provided, at various times, different ways of looking back to a past removed from the ancient world, which in the case of France loosely encompassed the period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, as argued by François Pupil, *Le Style Troubadour, ou la nostalgie du bon vieux temps*, Nancy 1985, 9-27. It is thus linked to the specific development of the figurative and decorative arts, proving particularly popular with the upper strata of Parisian society from the 1820s, as was analysed by Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution, 1815-1848*, Chicago 2004, 24-26; and Michael Marrinan, *Romantic Paris: Histories of a Cultural Landscape, 1800-1850*, Stanford 2009, 151-152.

¹⁷ According to comments quoted by Claude Mignot, Viollet-le-Duc in *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (1863-1872) would later pour scorn on the fashion for reducing *châteaux* to microscopic constructions, such as children's toys and houses for pets. Claude Mignot, *Architecture of the 19th Century*, Cologne 1994, 51-52 and 68-69.

¹⁸ The obvious political aspect of these Romantic castles was pointed out by Mignot, *Architecture of the 19th Century*, 67; and Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture: 1750-1890*, Oxford 2000, 166.

¹⁹ Angels Santa Bañeres discusses the presence of medieval castles in Dumas' literary works, which range from the imposing to the abandoned and ramshackle: "Dumas Gothique: poétique de la demeure", in: *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 290 (April-June 2008), 71-81.

belonging to the gloomy, imposing Château de Burcy, which sits in ruins on the Normandy coast. She later turns the pavilion into her "cabinet de travail".²⁰ Dumas used the Gothic pavilion at Port-Marly for the same purpose, as a place of retreat in which he can work. Erected a little higher up than the Renaissance castle, which would become the main residence of the Château de Monte-Cristo (fig. 1), this *châtelet* would later be known as the Château d'If (fig. 2), taking its name from the fortress that sits on a small island in the Bay of Marseille and which also appears in the novel *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*.

Act I: Performing Dumas

[11] Such was the increasing complexity and scale of Dumas' plans for Port-Marly – which reflected to some extent the unpredictable plots of the author's serialised novels – that he decided to hire an architect, perhaps after suspecting Planté's artistic shortcomings. The man he chose was Hippolyte-Louis Durand (1801-1882), a disciple of Louis-Hippolyte Lebas and Léon Vaudoyer at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts, where he had trained.²¹

²⁰ Dumas, *Pauline*, Paris 1838, chapter XI. Santa Bañeres expands on this first appearance of what would henceforth become a recurrent motif: an apparently fragile pavilion that provides shelter from an imposing and foreboding castle. It is also interesting to compare it with the pavilion set in the English landscape garden at the Château de Raimbault, which is found in George Sand's novel *Valentine* (1832) and is chosen by the main character as her refuge during the summer months: a "place of rest and delight", surrounded by climbing plants and a cascade. Santa Bañeres makes a pertinent connection between this dual castle-pavilion structure, with its special features, and the layout envisaged by Dumas at Port-Marly some years later. Santa Bañeres, "Dumas Gothique", 71-81.

²¹ During his training Durand was a *logiste* (participant) in the Prix de Rome in 1822, 1823, 1829 and 1830, and won *La Grande Médaille d'émulation* in 1830, according to the entries found in the *Dictionnaire des élèves architectes de l'École des beaux-arts (1796-1939)* – Base de données AGORHA/INHA – and the *Répertoire des architectes diocésains du XIXe siècle* – Éditions en ligne de l'École des Chartes (ELEC). Durand was a prominent figure thanks to his links with the Gothic Revival movement, and conducted studies for new churches in proportion to the number of inhabitants in the municipalities in question. Some of his designs were published in Durand, "Quelques considérations sur l'art religieux", in: *L'Art et l'archéologie en province* 9 (1849), 13-16. His private commissions included the eclectic Villa Eugénie in Biarritz (1852-1855), built for Empress Eugénie de Montijo. He also designed the Théâtre de Moulins (1842) and worked in the bishoprics of Bayonne, Tarbes, Gers and Landes (where he was appointed diocesan architect), designing parish churches in Bayonne (1846) and Peyrehorade (1857) and the original chapel at Notre-Dame de Lourdes (1865-1872). Louis Hautecœur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France*, vol. 6, Paris 1957, 324-325; Robin Middleton and David Watkin, *Architecture of the Nineteenth Century*, Milan 1977, 337-338; and Jean-Michel Leniaud, "Les constructions d'églises sous le Second Empire: architecture et prix de revient", in: *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 65 (1979), 267-278.

Though accounts of the first meeting between Dumas and Durand on the hill of Montferrands vary slightly, the very first version was presented in much the same style as a well-known exchange between Louis XIV and the architect Jules Hardouin-Mansart, in which the king gave instructions for the construction of what was originally intended as a *petit ermitage* but which would later become the royal residence at Marly-le-Roi:

*On passing by one fine day, just as Louis XIV had done at Marly-le-Chastel, Mr Dumas was struck by the position of the hill. He bought it immediately, summoned Mr Durand, his architect, and said to him, while busy with the task of writing his serialised novels: 'You are going to build a Renaissance château and a Gothic châtelet for me here, with two pavilions at the entrance and a park in the English style around them.' – 'Monsieur', retorted the modern-day Mansard, 'the ground is a bed of clay that will barely support the foundations'. – Mr Dumas was no more taken aback than Louis XIV had been. 'Then dig down to the tuff', he replied, 'and make two series of caves'. – 'It will cost you more than two hundred thousand francs, sir.' – 'When the cost reaches four hundred thousand, keep going.'*²²

[12] The architectural style of Dumas' eye-catching buildings may be considered in the same light of the prevailing architectures painted in stage sets at the time, a link to which no commentator has previously drawn attention. The combination of Gothic and Renaissance thus mirrored the close relationship between sets and architecture that Louis Hautecoeur had referred to in attempting to explain the French Renaissance style that gained ascendancy over the Neo-Gothic from 1835-1840.²³ Set design and stage painting provide excellent means for exploring the relationship between stage art and architecture, another clear example of the fusion of art forms during the Romantic age.²⁴ It should be remembered that due to the very complexities its use presented and the fact that its sheer scale could overwhelm developers, architecture was perhaps the medium least suited to the specific demands posed by Dumas' quest for self-aestheticisation. In view of his proven experience in staging several of his

²² This well-known dialogue is taken from the first version, written by Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris. Marly-Le-Roy", in: *Musée des familles. Lectures du soir* 11 (August 1847), 335. It can also be found in Maxime Du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*, vol. 2, Paris 1882, 186; Hautecoeur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique*, 316-318; Neave and Charron, *Monte-Cristo*, 7; and Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 24-25.

²³ Hautecoeur specifically mentions the painter and stage designer Charles Séchan as the artist responsible for the increasing influence of theatre sets in architecture and interior design in particular. Aside from Séchan's collaboration at the Théâtre-Historique and the Château de Monte-Cristo, which are discussed in footnotes 76 and 77, there is also evidence that the architect Théodore Charpentier occasionally worked as stage painter, which would provide another example of the crossover between architecture and stage design. Hautecoeur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique*, 273-274 and 370-371.

works, it is understandable therefore that in seeking to overcome the potential pitfalls of using architecture to project his cult of genius, Dumas should draw inspiration from painting – a field with which he was better acquainted – and from stage painting in particular. This was perhaps the most suitable medium for addressing the style and appearance of his buildings at Port-Marly, thanks to its themes, scale and visual impact.

[13] With regard to the development of the painting of theatre sets and its landmarks, it should be noted that Dumas recognised the debt he and all Romantic stage painters owed to the pioneering role played by Pierre Luc Charles Ciceri (1782-1868) in the transformation of French stage art:

*Father Ciceri. All of you bow down before the old man, who remains gay and young at heart despite his 70 years. Bow down to him, all of you: Séchan, Diéterle, Despléchin, Thierry, Cambon, Devoir and Moynet, the kings, viceroys and princes of modern stage design: It is Father Ciceri who painted the cloister for Robert le Diable.*²⁵

Here, Dumas makes an explicit reference to the acclaimed cloister backdrop Ciceri painted for the opera *Robert le Diable* (1831), regarded as the highpoint of *décor troubadour*. As research by Catherine Join-Diéterle has shown, it was during the July Monarchy that the *troubadour* style started to give way to architectural representations that were more coherent with the desire for historical truth in stage design, both in terms of form and

²⁴ The melodramatic staging of the works of Paul Delaroche, such as *Jane Grey* (1833) and *Assassinat du duc de Guise* (1834) has repeatedly been cited as an example of the connection between painting and stage art. The mutual collaboration between Delaroche and the playwright Casimir Delavigne is also documented, as is his use of miniature models, such as the ones he made for opera sets. These were sometimes created with the direct intervention of a set designer, such as Jules Diéterle, who provided the architectural backdrop in the portrait of the Duc de Guise: Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution*, 340-342. This interaction between historical painting and set designs during the Romantic period, in which painters such as Delaroche, Ingres, Delacroix and Hayez all played parts, is discussed in: *De la scène au tableau. David, Füssli, Klimt, Moreau, Lautrec, Degas, Vuillard ...*, ed. Guy Cogeval and Beatrice Avanzi, exh. cat., Paris 2009, 118-194.

²⁵ Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CCXXIV. Louis Véron's arrival as the opera's director proved decisive in the creation of this set, as did the support of Charles-Edmond Duponchel, an architect specialising in stage machinery, who shared Ciceri's enthusiasm for medieval architecture – increasingly popular at the time – and encouraged Ciceri to travel to Arles to study the cloister at Saint-Trophime, as related by Marrinan, *Romantic Paris*, 257. This fashion for spectacular illusion in theatre sets, which grew between 1820 and 1840, was followed by Dumas and Hugo, who were both heavily involved in the staging of their plays. Catherine Join-Diéterle, *Les décors de scène de l'Opéra de Paris à l'époque romantique*, Paris 1988, 30 and 212-216; Susan Crabtree and Peter Beudert, *Scenic Art for the Theatre: History, Tools and Techniques*, Oxford 2005, 400-406.

decorative details, which were copied from existing monuments, with Renaissance models being introduced.²⁶ Carefully crafted backdrops and expressive lighting effects were overshadowed by the sheer spectacle offered by sets, to which Dumas had himself contributed in some of his early plays – *Henri III et sa cour* (1828), *Christine* (1830), *Antony* (1831). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Dumas attempted to recreate the spectacular and eye-catching effect of theatre sets in presenting his buildings at the Château de Monte-Cristo.

[14] Due to Durand's initial misgivings about Dumas' whimsical demands, the writer also had good reason to seek assistance from his circle of artist friends.²⁷ This would explain the arrival on the scene of the painter Théodore-Henri Mansson (Rouen 1811 - Paris 1850),²⁸ responsible for a number of drawings of medieval monuments, in the region of Normandy in particular, who may have been introduced to Dumas by some of his friends, such as the stage painter Charles Séchan (1803-1874). Séchan was an old friend of Dumas' and gave him valuable assistance with his Théâtre-Historique and Château de Monte-Cristo projects.²⁹ Dumas may also have met Mansson on his many visits to Rouen, one of which was made in March 1846. Given the fact that he specialised in the painting of landscapes and medieval monuments, Mansson's collaboration would be especially timely in

²⁶ These set designs became ever more prominent during the July Monarchy, from the small theatres on the Boulevard du Temple to the Académie de Musique, and marked a development towards *vérité historique*, which drew on the latest technical innovations such as gas lighting or the changing of sets in full view of the audience. Prompted by their interest in the Middle Ages, stage designers soon began to expand the range of styles they used, drawing increasingly on the Renaissance and the art of the 17th and 18th centuries and evoking a courtly atmosphere that would later extend to the interior decoration of the theatres themselves. An example of this is the auditorium of the Académie, redecorated by Pierre Luc Charles Ciceri in 1840. Catherine Join-Diéterle, "Évolution de la scénographie à l'Académie de musique à l'époque romantique", in: *Romantisme* 38 (1982), 65-76; Join-Diéterle, *Les décors de scène*, 212-216, 224-226 and 233-236; and Mathias Auclair, "Les décors de scène à l'Opéra de Paris de 1810 à 1873", in: *De la scène au tableau*, 215-225.

²⁷ These friends, whom Dumas met when settling in Paris, helped him on other occasions, one of them being the well-known episode in which his rented flat was decorated for Carnival in 1833, with artists such as Eugène Delacroix, Louis and Clément Boulanger, Alfred and Tony Johannot, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Louis Godefroy Jadin, Antoine-Louis Barye, Célestin Nanteuil and the stage painter Ciceri all lending their assistance. It was through Ciceri, *peintre en chef* at the Paris Opera from 1815, that Dumas would meet the most important stage painters of the Romantic period. Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapters CCXXIV and CCXXIX; also commented upon by Join-Diéterle, *Les décors de scène*, 26. For his part, Planté continued to work with Dumas as a developer until late 1846, when he sued the author for unpaid fees, prompting a lawsuit and the drafting of a specialist report, as commented on by Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 40.

the design of the Gothic pavilion (fig. 3), as stated by an anonymous source in *L'Illustration* in February 1848: "Mansson, the delightful painter of all types of architecture, was consulted. He made an adorable model of a little Norman house, cut like lace and polished like a jewel."³⁰

²⁸ Mansson devoted his short career to painting the urban landscapes of his birthplace and medieval monuments such as Gothic cathedrals and churches, as stated in the list of his works provided by Émile Bellier de la Chavignerie and Louis Auvray, *Dictionnaire général des artistes de l'école française depuis l'origine des arts du dessin jusqu'à nos jours. Architectes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs et lithographes*, vol. 2, Paris 1885, 23-24. Following a visit to Cologne, his contemporary Lottin de Laval makes an enlightening reference to Mansson's gift for depicting medieval urban landscapes: "There was a lovely Gothic house there. It looked like one of the houses drawn by Mansson, an artist with a magical ability to recreate the towns of centuries gone by." Lottin de Laval, *Marie de Médicis. Histoire du règne de Louis XIII, d'après des manuscrits inédits du cardinal de Richelieu, et d'un bénédictin*, Paris 1834, 316.

²⁹ The drawings *Cathédrale de Rouen*, *Manoir d'Escoville* and *Vue de l'abside de l'église Saint Pierre, Caen* were completed by Séchan on a trip to Normandy in 1842 and exhibited at the Paris Salon that same year. For more on the work carried out by this "peintre-décorateur", mainly at the *atelier* he set up with Édouard Despléchin (1802-1871) and Jules Diéterle (1811-1889), see Bellier de la Chavignerie et Auvray, *Dictionnaire général des artistes*, 488-489; Jeanne Doin, "Charles Séchan et son atelier de décoration théâtrale pendant le romantisme", in: *Gazette des beaux-arts* 758^e livraison (1^{er} semestre 1925), 344-360; and Nicole Wild, *Décors et costumes du XIXe siècle*, vol. 2: *Théâtres et décorateurs*, Paris 1993, 311, 313 and 341-343. The third volume of *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* contains more drawings of monuments in the same region by Séchan and other Romantic artists and stage painters, such as Théodore Géricault, Jean-Baptiste Isabey, Eugène Ciceri and Richard Parkes Bonington: Alphonse de Cailleux, Charles Nodier and Justin Taylor, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France. Ancienne Normandie*, vol. 3, Paris 1878. For more on the impact of this publication and, in broader terms, the perfecting of the art of lithography as a facet of the rediscovery and appreciation of the charms of medieval architecture and France's rural landscapes, see Marrinan, *Romantic Paris*, 204.

³⁰ "Monte-Cristo", 410.



3 Châtelet or Château d'If, northeastern facade; part of Alexandre Dumas' Château de Monte-Cristo, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

[15] Mansson contributed a sketch of a picturesque Norman house, a type of urban construction that he, Mansson, would have been very familiar with due to his family roots. The building would ultimately represent a move away from the rustic or cottage style more commonly seen in small garden constructions in the 19th century. It is noteworthy that this medieval typology reflected some of the architectural styles most widely used in theatre sets of the time, in which the urban landscape also played an important role. Sketches for these sets show several such houses with their trademark timber frames or *pans de bois*, jettied upper storeys and pitched roofs with dormer windows, such as the sketch that the aforementioned Séchan in collaboration with Feuchère, Diéterle and Despléchin drew for Constance Square, a setting in the first act of the opera *La Juive* (1834) by F. Halévy (fig. 4).³¹

³¹ *Un carrefour de la ville de Constance en 1414*, a colour lithograph (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Estampes Scènes Juive (6). Id. Numéro 42279088). The most distinctive medieval building in this painting also shows a corner tower quite similar to the one that forms part of the *châtelet*. Other similarities with stage paintings in the *troubadour* style (as researched by Join-Diéterle) may be found in the Parisian houses figuring in the backdrop painted by Charles Cambon, another of Ciceri's disciples, for Louise Bertin's *Esmeralda* (1836), acte II, tableau 1. Join-Diéterle, "Évolution de la scénographie", 65-76; Join-Diéterle, *Les décors de scène*, 37 and 42.



4 Charles Séchan, *Un carrefour de la ville de Constance en 1414*, part of the colour lithograph showing the backdrop for the opera *La Juive*, 1834 (reprod. from: Join-Diéterle, *Les décors de scène*, 37)

[16] The stone-carved decorative elements adorning the windows of the main facades of the Château d'If are also medieval in inspiration. This particular repertoire borrows from French Flamboyant Gothic and, more specifically, from the motifs of civil and religious architecture, which Mansson was very well acquainted with thanks to his field trips and which he captured in his drawings and engravings.³² This could explain the shape of the ogee arches and gables and the flame-like tracery, which is inspired by Rouen churches such as Saint-Ouen and Saint-Maclou or the churches of Evreux, Louviers and Saint Riquier. Similar inspirations can be found in the festoons of the double window on the main facade, which are copied from the gallery of the church of Sainte-Madeleine in Troyes, and the rose window in the balcony and ledge of that same window, which are very similar to the rose windows found in the Palais de Justice of Rouen.³³ The synthesis proposed by Mansson would have been to the liking of Dumas, who, instead of a replica of a historical building, sought a striking and original design that would surprise his guests and recreate a fragment of the Middle Ages, not unlike the scenes depicted on the theatre sets of the time. As regards the features that could perhaps point to the origin of the medieval appearance of the *châtelet*, Dumas was not only familiar with the Gothic architecture of Rouen, which he had visited several times – on a trip he made to Trouville in

³² The list prepared after Mansson's death for the auction that took place on 27 February 1850 included urban landscapes taken in Evreux, Louviers, Rouen, Favières, Troyes, Amiens, or Abbeville. Bellier de la Chavignerie et Auvray, *Dictionnaire général des artistes*, 23-24.

1831, for instance – but held it in great esteem.³⁴ Moreover, in drawing on this source of inspiration, the author can be seen as paying homage to the Norman origin of his ancestors, the Davy de la Pailleterie family, which settled in Bielleville-en-Caux, Haute-Normandie, in the 15th century.

[17] This means of combining a tribute to one's ancestry with an admiration for medieval heritage has some significant precedents in the emergence of Romanticism on France's cultural landscape during the early decades of the 19th century. Although Dumas would not have visited the visionary Musée des Monuments, which was put together by Alexandre Lenoir and which closed in 1816, by evoking medieval architecture he pursued the selfsame type of approximation – one more imaginative and sentimental than rigorous in nature – in rescuing elements from the past.³⁵ While Lenoir had no compunction in resorting to invention when original items did not suffice – as in his recreation of the tomb of Éloïse and Abélard using other remains – the *châtelet* Dumas commissioned clearly demonstrates how elements copied from real buildings are inserted into a contradictory construction, with cultured traits being combined with aspects of popular architecture, resulting in a building that is small in size but striking all the same because of its sheer range of viewpoints and the combination of whimsical decorative motifs. All this points to it being a folly, a type of building that marks a departure from the trend towards historical accuracy and stylistic unity, which had emerged in French historicist architecture of the 1830s and 1840s, a time when knowledge of medieval art grew thanks to the first archaeological societies and the appearance of publications devoted to historical monuments.³⁶ In this respect, the blend of originality and surprise that Dumas sought to impose as a hallmark of his Port-Marly residence proved more appealing to him than historical accuracy.

³³ In these buildings, which provided the main subjects of several of his watercolours, Mansson achieved a level of creativity normally associated with Romantic painters. In Dumas' *châtelet* he even added motifs that extended far beyond the Gothic aesthetic, particularly in the composition of the vase with flowers on the double window of the northeastern facade. For a comparison between these sources of inspiration and the decorative repertoire of Dumas' *châtelet* see Jacques Baudoin, *La sculpture flamboyante en Normandie et Île-de-France*, Paris 1992, 55-84.

³⁴ "With its cathedral, the church of Saint-Ouen, its old houses and their carved woodwork, the town hall and the Hôtel de Bourgtheroulde, Rouen is a lovely city, so lovely that one yearns to see it again." Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CCV.

³⁵ The links between fantasy and escapism in the past and the arrangement of exhibits at Lenoir's museum were correctly identified by Dominique Poulot, "Alexandre Lenoir et les musées des monuments français", in: *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. II.2, Paris 1986, 497-532; Pupil, *Le Style Troubadour*, 117-121; and Marrinan, *Romantic Paris*, 133-137.

[18] Once excavations and earthmoving were underway in 1845, the confirmation of the existence of springs at the site opened up an altogether unexpected but rather attractive possibility of a water-filled moat reinforcing the isolation of this picturesque Gothic *châtelet*.³⁷ This would be a way for the owner to impose man's control over nature, a facet of his discussion with Durand, a *tour de force* in which Dumas once more followed the example set by Louis XIV. Moreover, the fact that building work coincided with the publication of *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* also influenced Dumas' decision to locate the *châtelet* on an island. The shelter and refuge that Dumas often dreamed of emerged as a replica of the Château d'If, which appeared in the aforementioned novel and from which the replica borrowed both its name and its signification as a "prison" in which he could go about his everyday work.³⁸ According to initial accounts, the interior design of the *châtelet* reinforced these images of confinement. Pointing out the contrast with Dumas' hectic Parisian life, Pitre-Chevalier likened the place to an oratory:

The interior of the châtelet will be decorated in the same way as the oratories of the queens of yesteryear: a high fireplace adorned with carvings of fruit and flowers, oak panelling with gold leaf mouldings, the leaves on

³⁶ Mignot, *Architecture of the 19th Century*, 52-56; and Bergdoll, *European Architecture: 1750-1890*, 166-167. As regards civil architecture, Théophile Gautier ridiculed the nostalgic and dream-like reinterpretations of the Troubadour Style, in referring to its Middle Ages pastiches, while Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, also in the 1830s, criticised the fashion for decorating aristocratic salons in the style of castle interiors, as pointed out by Pupil, *Le Style Troubadour*, 21-23. In contrast, the resources managed by Dumas may represent a middle way, one more consistent with the context of *château* restorations during the reign of Louis-Philippe, which were governed by a heightened desire for historical accuracy, as in Madame de Maintenon's drawing room at the Château de Fontainebleau or in the interiors of the Château de Pau. These respectively followed decorative guidelines corresponding to the eras of Louis XIV and Henri IV, as noted by Marrinan, *Romantic Paris*, 156-157.

³⁷ The presence of the moat together with the asymmetrical configuration of the corner turret have been interpreted by Xavier Blutel as an evocation of the image of the Château des Fossés, which was so deeply ingrained in Dumas' memories of his childhood years. An extremely suggestive comparison between the side elevations of both buildings is revealed at a website devoted to Dumas' strong attachment to Les Fossés: Xavier Blutel, "Les Fossés, matrice de l'imaginaire dumasien", in: *Château des Fossés (Alexandre Dumas)*, <http://w3.litterature-lieux.com/EsMaker/index.asp?Clef=17&Page=3> (accessed 28 November 2011).

³⁸ The intention had been to call the island Monte-Cristo, to make the reference to his literary output even more obvious: "Now, said Mr Dumas between dramas, and still very much in the manner of Louis XIV, 'there are springs here [...] make me pools here and there, and a river around the Gothic pavilion [...]. I want it to sit on an island that will be called the Isle of Monte-Christo'." Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris", 335.

*the frieze being natural in colour, a sky-blue ceiling with countless gold stars [...]. In the eastern turret Mr Dumas has set up a little study, where he will stay with nothing but a table, a pen and an inkwell for company [...]. Next to the table, a gold button pushes – or so it is said – a steel spring that raises and lowers the island's drawbridge [...]. If a friend arrives, the portcullis comes up. If the visitor is unwanted, it stays down.*³⁹

[19] These first accounts detailing the fusion between architecture, theatre, painting and literature in the design of the spectacle buildings at the Château de Monte-Cristo also provide confirmation of the crossover between literature and the visual arts, a process that had been unfolding in France since the 1820s. In his early conversations with Durand, Dumas had already envisaged fusing the buildings with his own literary universe. This idea developed into a far more ambitious plan, namely the use of both constructions at Port-Marly as the supporting pillars of an elaborate iconographic programme centred on his self-glorification as a writer.⁴⁰ Through what is nothing short of a monument to his ego, Dumas sought to project his expansive personality by invoking his ancestors and patrons while also documenting, in a somewhat arrogant manner, the works that had brought him glory. Thus, and under his careful supervision at all times, the messages contained on the facades of the *châtelet* spread to the outer walls of the Château de Monte-Cristo, the setting for his epiphany as a writer through his rendering as an effigy accompanied by portraits of his literary role models. The sequence begins at the Château d'If (fig. 5), where the porch at the main entrance houses a sculpture of Dumas' dog Mylord, a warning that continues a tradition initiated by the Romans.

³⁹ Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris", 335.

⁴⁰ An interpretation shared by Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 357. Hendrix has compared Dumas' goals to those of another writer and eventual architectural designer, Horace Walpole. Both transported their fictional words to their places of residence as an alternative means of expressing their egos. In the case of Dumas, this is the purpose behind his most obvious intention of flaunting his unexpected success. Hendrix, *Writer's Houses*, 2-3.



5 Château d'If, northwestern entrance and sculpted details; part of Alexandre Dumas' *Château de Monte-Cristo*, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

[20] In the same porch can be seen the title *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*, which is inscribed at eye level so that visitors cannot fail to see it. This first reference to one of his most outstanding literary successes is complemented by the titles of some eighty other works engraved on windows, door frames and ashlar, and which stand out on the reddish background of the facades and the tower of the *châtelet*. No pattern seems to have been followed in the distribution of these titles, which were engraved more or less as Dumas completed the works in question. These inscriptions lent the building another striking dimension, that of a work in progress, designed to be completed as its owner channelled his creative energy into the various literary genres that attracted his interest. The attempt to organise his works according to genres, which manifests itself in the inscription "ROMANS HISTORIQUES" above the windows on the western facade, failed on the other facades. The only groupings that seem to follow a pattern are the proliferation of novels and historical works flanking the entrance and the theatrical texts on the east turret.

[21] The use of all these titles turned Dumas' refuge and workplace into a showcase, the recording in stone of his literary output. Such inscriptions cannot be considered an entirely new development. Sixteenth-century French humanists showed their predilection for emblems and mottos by placing them in prominent areas of their houses, as Louis de Ronsard did on the facade of his family's house in La Possonnière (Dépt. Maine-et-Loire), and Michel de Montaigne did on the beams of the library at the Château de Montaigne in Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne (Dépt. Dordogne).⁴¹ However, it is

⁴¹ Poisson, *Les maisons d'écrivain*, 22-23.

the outer walls of the Library of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris that must have inspired Dumas to create a record of his output. The decoration of the library's exterior, planned by Henri Labrouste following the start of construction work in 1843, involved the etching of the names of 810 writers on the main facades. These names were arranged in columns beneath the windows of the main floor, the aim being to use the most distinguished writers in the history of world literature as both ornamentation and an indication of the building's function, while also establishing a physical correspondence with the volumes housed on the same floor, on the walls of the inner reading room.⁴² In the case of the *châtelet*, the etching of the title of each of Dumas's works on a block of stone revealed their value as a financial support for the author and his whims, and gave concrete form to the suggestive and poetic metaphor of these works as a construction material for the building of his retreat – a creative haven built upon literary stories, books as the cornerstones of a castle of letters, as it were. These visual metaphors, based on the combination of words and images, are hardly surprising given Dumas' career as a dramatic author who lavished as much care on the staging of his works as on the texts themselves, establishing a link with the aesthetic proposals of other Romantic writers, such as Victor Hugo, in affirming that the basis of language lay in images.⁴³

[22] Thanks to the combination of literary quotations with yet another level of figurative representation, namely the bas-reliefs of characters and scenes from his literary creations, the Château d'If also served to illustrate certain passages from Dumas' works, as though it were itself a theatrical adaptation. The use of theatrical staging techniques reveals a desire to create a spectacular effect and thereby attract the attention of his readers and audiences. A further comparison with Sir Walter Scott can be made here, for if the house at Abbotsford (Scottish Borders) was interpreted in a figurative sense by a number of commentators as "the Waverley novels in

⁴² Labrouste had earlier worked with Félix Duban on the construction of the facade of the Palais des Études, the central building at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, work on which began in 1832. The names of different artists were inscribed on the frieze that runs above the ground floor of this Italianate facade, thereby continuing the tradition of expressive or talking architecture, which had emerged from the revolutionary architecture of Boullée and Ledoux. Labrouste's interest in and use of inscriptions as architectural ornamentation, in connection with the image Hugo used of a building as a book in the chapter "Ceci tuera cela" in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1832) – to which Labrouste himself referred – is explored by Neil Levine, "The Book and the Building: Hugo's Theory of Architecture and Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève", in: *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century French Architecture*, ed. Robin Middleton, Cambridge 1982, 138-173. As regards the informative and symbolic meaning of the inscriptions on the library of Sainte-Geneviève, see Levine, "Il rovesciamento del sistema della rappresentazione nelle biblioteche di Labrouste", in: *Henri Labrouste, 1801-1875*, ed. Renzo Dubbini, Milan 2002, 166-190; and Roberto Gargiani, "Ornamento e costruzione in Sainte-Geneviève", in: *Henri Labrouste, 1801-1875*, 143-165.

stone",⁴⁴ Dumas' chosen residence made his intentions very clear also, in that he transferred his works to stone, combining texts and images as a means of symbolising and incorporating literary meanings.⁴⁵ The very first literary scene can be found on the ogee arch sheltering the entrance of the *châtelet*. The relief on the projecting keystone depicts the moment when Edmond Dantès uses a pick to ease aside the slab providing access to the cave where the treasure of the island of Monte-Cristo is hidden (fig. 5). This scene would seem to be an entirely fitting one, as it highlights the aforementioned connection between his highly acclaimed novel and the location of the *châtelet*.

⁴³ While there is no information available to support this, Dumas may have been familiar with Christine de Pizan's work *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405), where books and texts were used as building materials in erecting the city walls (I owe this suggestion to Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, to whom I am grateful for her tips on medieval art and culture). It should be remembered that Victor Hugo compared Dumas with an architect – "ce vaste et agile architecte" – and Dumas must have known of the aforementioned passage in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in which his friend Hugo married these selfsame elements – books and architecture – in presenting the cathedral as a "book of stone", suggesting an image that opposed monumental architecture as a great book of humanity with its successor, the printed paper book, in the well-known line of argument that forms the basis of "Ceci tuera cela": Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1832), fifth book, chapter II.

According to Léon Gozlan's account, Dumas intended to name the avenues in his garden after his most important works, creating a forerunner of the literary theme park in the process:

- "'But where will your park be?' I asked Dumas, having sorrowfully remarked that the size of the property was smaller than the imagination of the owner.
- 'I told my gardener and you will hear it for yourself: it will be here.
- Right here, where we are now?
- Yes.
- It will be very small, I told him. It will barely be any bigger than the foyer of the Comédie-Française.
- It will be small, that is true, but it will be very literary.
- What is a very literary park, my dear Dumas?
- What I mean is that I will name each avenue after one of my works. There will be a Lorenzino Avenue and an Antony Avenue.
- I understand, but that will create a lot of shade for walkers.
- What do you want? Glory comes before shade.'"

Léon Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", in: *Almanach comique, pittoresque, drolatique, critique & charivarique pour 1848*, Paris 1848, 29-38.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott*, 4-5; Ann Rigney, "Abbotsford: Dislocation and Cultural Remembrance", in: *Writer's Houses*, 75-91.

[23] Another novel by Dumas, *La dame de Monsoreau*, serialised in *Le Siècle* throughout 1846, inspired a second scene on the lintel of the lower window of the northeastern facade (fig. 6). In it the fat friar Gorenflot is depicted riding an ass and raising his arms as if giving thanks. Flanking the scene is a transcription of the cheery song he habitually sings at the prospect of a good meal, creating a whole that represents a celebration of the enjoyment derived from good food and is very much in keeping with Dumas' hedonistic character.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ As this section from *L'Illustration* 261 (26 February 1848), 411, shows, the quotations and literary allusions of the Château de Monte-Cristo did not go unnoticed for long: "A genuine novel in stone, one day of boredom in its design and three years in its execution [...]. The poet as mason; he advised on new designs, traced out paths and diverted springs. On each occasion he spent in an hour what he had earned during the day, though as each day passed he returned to the house on the Place Médicis filled with even more happiness, a house he rented while he waited for his own to be completed." Pitre Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris. Marly-Le-Roy", 335, gave his own reaction: "The idea was to create a novel [...]. And the novel was created [...]. On reading the inscriptions, a story unfolds, one in which Mr Dumas' pen is the wand that builds for him houses of faith." Finally, Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", 35, commented: "Which architect in the world would have designed such a monument? The poet's thoughts took shape and Monte-Cristo came into being. It is a monument in lines of syllables and alternate rhymes."

⁴⁶ The inscription on the left reads: "The ass, escaped from bridle rein/ At once with joy pricks up his ears/ The wine, uncorked, with joy is fain/ To pour the ruby stream that cheers", and the one on the right: "But neither ass nor wine's so gay/ As monk escaped from convent sway/ Who, seated in a vine-clad bower/ May safe defy the abbot's power". (Translation taken from: http://www.archive.org/stream/ldamedemonsoreau00dumauoft/ldamedemonsoreau00dumauoft_djvu.txt). Dumas, *La dame de Monsoreau*, Paris 1846, chapter XXVII). A close-up view of this relief was previously afforded by a wooden staircase that provided access to the first floor of the *châtelet*. Its identification, as well as that of Edmond Dantès, was proposed by Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 59.



6 Château d'If, window in the northeastern facade; part of Alexandre Dumas' Château de Monte-Cristo, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

The intrados of the keystone, adorned with a relief of a hooded character, may well be another representation of Gorenflot, although the slim figure may more easily be associated with Diane de Méridor, rendered unconscious after falling from her horse, as she is portrayed in the third novel of the series, *Les Quarante-cinq* (1847-1848). The false ledge under this window superimposes an anchor – traditionally regarded as a symbol of hope – on the Flamboyant traceries. Beneath the anchor can be seen Cicero's hope-filled maxim "Dum spiro spero", which Dumas used in the novel *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* (1846).⁴⁷

[24] There are further references to Dumas' work in the east corner tower, though here they are combined with expressive motifs referring to his ancestors and some of the most influential people in his life and artistic career. The titles of his works, in this case his favourite dramas – "HENRI III", "CHRISTINE", "NAPOLEON", "ANTONI" and "CHARLES VII" – thus remain

⁴⁷ The maxim appears in the dialogue Lorin and Maurice engage in upon seeing the scaffold erected for Marie Antoinette's execution. Dumas, *Le chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, Paris 1845-1846, chapter XLIX. It should be added that it can also be seen in one corner of a portrait of Bussy d'Amboise – the main character of *La dame de Monsoreau* – displayed at the Musée des Ursulines in Mâcon: "Portrait of Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, dit Bussy d'Amboise (1549-1579)", in: http://www.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/joconde_fr?ACTION=CHERCHER&FIELD_1=REF&VALUE_1=01720002373 (accessed 4 December 2011). There is a reference to a portrait of Bussy, bearing the same proud gaze, in chapter XXXV of Dumas' novel.

present. These are engraved on the ashlar stones inserted in the upper part of each face of the tower and run eastwards in chronological order (fig. 7).



7 Château d'If, east corner tower; part of Alexandre Dumas' Château de Monte-Cristo, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

[25] Several capital letters are inserted above these titles, on the frieze beneath the eaves and amid the motifs of flora and fauna that provide it with its lavish decoration. Read in the same direction, they appear as "A", "D", "EA", "L" and "P". Far from being literary references, these could be allusions to people who played a decisive role in Dumas' life through the friendship or support they showed to the author at various times. They are placed, as a result, as high up the tower as possible, level with the roof. The people referred to are either Augustine Deviolaine or Adèle Dalvin, one of his first female companions (A and D);⁴⁸ his friend Étienne Arago ("EA" superimposed), who a few years earlier gave favourable reviews to one of Dumas' first publications, the *Nouvelles contemporaines*;⁴⁹ and finally King Louis-Philippe d'Orléans (L and P), his former employer and patron, who, in

⁴⁸ If Augustine was his first childhood playmate, as Dumas himself states in his memoirs – Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter XXI – it is arguable as to whether Adèle was his first love, as both Albine Hardi and Aglaé Tellier can also be regarded as possible candidates in this respect. Alain Decaux, *Dictionnaire amoureux de Alexandre Dumas*, Paris 2010, 229 and 401-413. In view of these doubts, there is another possible interpretation as to the origin of these two letters, namely that the initials are those of his father, Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie.

⁴⁹ As a grateful Dumas would recall in his memoirs, this was the beginning of a friendship that would grow even stronger when Arago was appointed director of the Théâtre du Vaudeville, and further still when they both took part in the revolutionary events of 1830. Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CVI.

his capacity as the Duc d'Orléans, had earlier honoured Dumas by attending the premiere of *Henri III et sa cour*.⁵⁰

[26] Although two other plays are featured on the main floor of the tower – "ANGÈLE" and "RICHARD DARLINGTON" – this level owes its prominence to a series of heraldic engravings devoted to the writer's father, General Alexandre Dumas Davy de la Pailleterie, namely three (pseudo-)coats of arms situated on the keystones of the pointed arches of each window. Moving from west to east, the first of these coats of arms features a band surrounded by acanthus leaves, set in a field of gules, charged with three horses' heads and accompanied by a pyramid and a palm tree. This composition was probably created by Dumas in tribute to his father; in it he combines figures alluding to the latter's campaigns in Egypt, which included the Battle of the Pyramids, and to the three horses his father was forced to use during the Battle of Mantua.⁵¹ The leaves surrounding the second coat of arms bear the motto "DEUS/DEDIT/DEUS/DABIT", which was adopted by his father, while the arms themselves are of the Davy de la Pailleterie lineage – azure in colour, with three eaglets shown circling an annulet – as described by Dumas himself in *Mes mémoires*.⁵² His father's motto appears again around the third coat of arms, in which the mast of a boat rises from an azure field. This can be interpreted as a version of the surname Dumas or Du Mas – based on the presence of the French homophone "mât" [engl. mast] – but also as an allusion to the ship that brought his father back from

⁵⁰ The monogram "LP" may be found in some official portraits of King Louis-Philippe, such as on the throne appearing in François Gérard's 1833 painting for the Chamber of Peers at the Palais de Luxembourg, which was so admired by the monarch that he had several copies of it made. Michael Marrinan, *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe: Art and Ideology in Orleanist France, 1830-1848*, Yale 1988, 12-13. Owing to his republican beliefs and the active role he played in the July Revolution of 1830, which resulted in Charles X's overthrow, Dumas' attitude towards King Louis-Philippe alternated between gratitude for the support he once gave him to a desire to distance himself from the monarch, as the writer wrote in his memoirs. In fact, Dumas had greater sympathy towards the king's first-born son, Ferdinand-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (1810-1842), who was much appreciated by the artists of the Romantic generation because of his artistic leanings. In spite of everything, and as a final showing of his debt of gratitude, Dumas travelled to England in August 1850 to attend the funeral of the former monarch, who died in exile. Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 184-194, 356-357 and 436-437.

⁵¹ This coat of arms can be seen in one of the carvings that surround the *châtelet's* fireplace, together with the arms of the Davy de la Pailleterie lineage, as Bell indicates, *Alexandre Dumas*, 221.

⁵² He describes his family's coat of arms in the same chapter in which he recalls his father's motto: "The family arms were azure with three golden eagles in flight, their wings extended, two situated above the other, with a silver annulet at the centre." Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter II.

Egypt.⁵³ These coats of arms can therefore be seen as an attempt by Dumas to show his father's noble lineage and narrate the high point and subsequent decline of the latter's military career.⁵⁴

[27] The remaining escutcheons carved above other windows of the *châtelet* feature the arms of several family alliances established by the Davy de la Pailletterie, a triumphant proclamation of Dumas' entire lineage and complying so well with heraldic rules and guidelines that it can be safely assumed that the writer received advice on their design. There are three pairs of coats of arms, conjoined in fess. In terms of kinship they seem to be arranged in order of seniority. On the northeastern facade, above the window in the circular, turret-like section flanking the entrance, appears a blank coat of arms that was left uncarved. It is accompanied by one bearing the arms of the Pardieu family – gules, a saltire cantoned with four eagles.⁵⁵ To the right of the main entrance on the western corner can be seen a first coat of arms, that of the Monginot – gules, a gold chevron between a lion and two stones, in place of argent mullets, and a bell between trefoils on a chief argent. On a second can be found the arms of the Du Bellay family – argent, a bend of fusils gules with six fleur-de-lis.⁵⁶ Finally, above the lower window opening onto the lateral facade on the northwestern side appears a variant of the Cross of the Order of Malta – gules, a cross argent – and the

⁵³ Although this version of the Dumas coat of arms is not very common, it is possible that it may have been copied from one of the engravings of *Art heraldique* in the *Recueil des planches de l'Encyclopédie par ordre de matières*, vol. VII, Paris 1789, pl. 10. A possible reason for this choice is the desire to depict the episode when General Dumas left Egypt on the ship *La Belle-Maltese*, which was badly in need of repairs, an episode that ended with the general being taken prisoner and poisoned in Tarente, an unfortunate sequence of events that provides a counterpart to the triumphant first coat of arms of the series.

⁵⁴ On General Dumas' fall into disgrace and the mark he left on his son: André Maurois, *Les trois Dumas*, Paris 1957, 18-37; John G. Gallaher, *General Alexandre Dumas: Soldier of the French Revolution*, Carbondale 1997, 119-143; Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 9-14; and Tom Reiss, *Dumas, le comte noir. Gloire, révolution, trahison: l'histoire du vrai comte de Monte-Cristo*, Paris 2013.

⁵⁵ The coat of arms makes reference to the marriage between Pierre Davy, "Sire of La Pailterye", and Anne de Pardieu in 1570, according to the genealogical data provided by Gilles Henry, *Dans les pas des... Dumas. Les mousquetaires de l'aventure: Normandie, Haïti, Paris*, Bayeux 2010, 4-12; and Musée Alexandre Dumas, "Une famille: Les Dumas", in: *Histoire et généalogie axonaise* 6 (2010), 8-11.

⁵⁶ The presence of these lineages is justified by the fact that Jacques Davy de la Pailletterie married Jacqueline du Bellay in the first half of the 17th century, the couple later having a son, Pierre Davy de la Pailletterie, who married Suzanne Monginot in 1694.

coat of arms of the Davy de la Pailleterie once again, bringing to a close the series of heraldic symbols adorning the building.⁵⁷

[28] The lower windows of the corner tower provide further embodiments of Dumas' literary output, namely a series of figures in typical 16th-century attire. Seen in conjunction with the philosophical mottos surrounding them, their portrayal and the postures they assume allow them to be identified with characters from the series of plays Dumas devoted to the Valois (fig. 8).



8 Château d'If, sculptural motifs on the corner tower; part of Alexandre Dumas' Château de Monte-Cristo, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

Their appearance in the iconography of the Château de Monte-Cristo creates a link with the revival of figures and scenes of France's past, a feature typical of the literature and painting of the *troubadour* style, and shares with it a desire to humanise the way in which these characters are presented.⁵⁸ Moving from west to east, the first character, positioned next to the motto "AUT CAESAR/AUT NIHIL" and wielding a dagger, represents the ambitious and quick-tempered Duc de Guise, as revealed in scene IV of *Henri III et sa cour*.⁵⁹ The main character is King Henri III himself, shown sitting on a throne and wearing his favourite cloak, with one of his beloved "petits chiens

⁵⁷ The admission of several members of the Davy de la Pailleterie family to the Order of Malta is recorded in an 18th-century document reproduced by Henry, *Dans les pas des... Dumas*, 8. Dumas' passion for heraldic signs manifests itself again at his house on the Boulevard Waterloo, Brussels, into which he moved in 1852. The ceiling in the main living room was decorated with coats of arms, along with those of other writers such as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Hugo or Nodier. Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 424-425.

⁵⁸ Both literature and painting drew inspiration from the heroes of the so-called good old days, among them prominent French monarchs from Saint Louis through to Henri IV, a point made by Pupil, *Le Style Troubadour*, 459-481.

anglais" on his lap and the motto "MANET ULTIM/COELO"⁶⁰ and two crowns appearing on the same bend. These two crowns symbolise the kingdoms of Poland and France, over which he ruled. Finally, the character sitting on a throne decorated with the royal crown and the letter "H" could well be the court jester Chicot, shown in the act of writing and next to the motto "VIDEO/RIDEO".⁶¹ The three birds depicted on the keystones of the lower arches, and which spring from the rockery on which the tower rests, are connected with each of the aforementioned characters: the swan turning its neck beneath the Duc de Guise, perhaps symbolising his decline and death; the eagle with its wings spread beneath Henri III, also present in his coat of arms; and the watchful crane standing on one leg beneath Chicot.

Act II: J'aime qui m'aime

[29] This iconographic programme reaches its climax in the facades of the Château de Monte-Cristo, the main building of the property and designed as a residence and a place for entertaining guests (fig. 9).



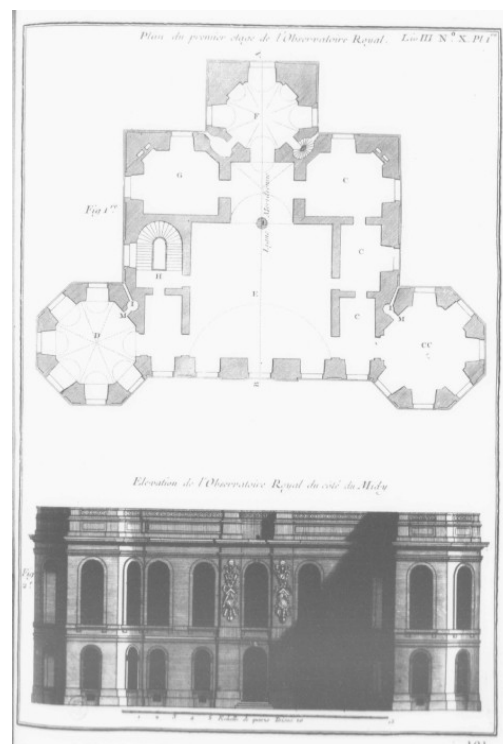
9 Neo-Renaissance chateau, commissioned by Alexandre Dumas and named Château de Monte-Cristo, main facade, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

⁵⁹ Dumas transcribes this motto in his novel *Les Quarante-cinq*, Paris 1847-1848, chapter LXI, when describing the portrait of Diane de Méridor's father, who is depicted moribund on his death bed. The motto appears next to him, in red, as though written with blood.

⁶⁰ The motto also appears in *Les Quarante-cinq* - chapter LXXIX - in a dialogue between the king and his jester Chicot about the Duc de Guise.

⁶¹ This ironic motto suitably characterises Chicot's dual role as a jester and counsellor. With his long legs crossed and his head turned towards Henri III, he appears to be bearing witness to an attempt by the Duc de Guise on the king's life.

Its design can be attributed to the architect Durand, though always under the supervision and guidance of Dumas himself. Despite its name and style, it is not a *château classique* in the French Baroque tradition but a small palace that freely reworks examples of French architecture from the period between the 16th and 19th centuries. The main source of inspiration for the format may have been the Observatoire Royal, designed in 1667 by Claude Perrault for the city of Paris, which like the Château de Monte-Cristo has a square ground plan with two octagonal corner turrets on both sides of the front facade, in addition to a projecting rectangular section at the rear (fig. 10a).⁶²



10a Observatoire Royal, Paris, ground view and elevation (reprod. from: Blondel, *Architecture française*, vol. II, book III, chapter X, pl. I)

[30] The coexistence of this model, taken from the Baroque period and the era of Louis XIV in particular, with a medieval-style construction such as the Gothic *châtelet* must be viewed within the context of the increasingly eclectic direction architecture took in the 1840s.⁶³ Buildings designed for gardens from the 18th century onwards provide, as stated above, another

⁶² The building, which still stands at the end of the Avenue de l'Observatoire, has barely suffered any alterations in terms of its original floor plan or size. Hauteceur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France*, vol. II, 453-455. It is worth noting that this model was included by Perrault in his edition of Vitruvius' treatise – Claude Perrault, *Les dix livres d'architecture de Vitruve, corrigez et traduits nouvellement en français, avec des notes et des figures*, Paris 1673, book I, pl. II – and later in Jacques-François Blondel, *Architecture française*, vol. II, Paris 1752, book III, chapter X, pl. I, 57-61.

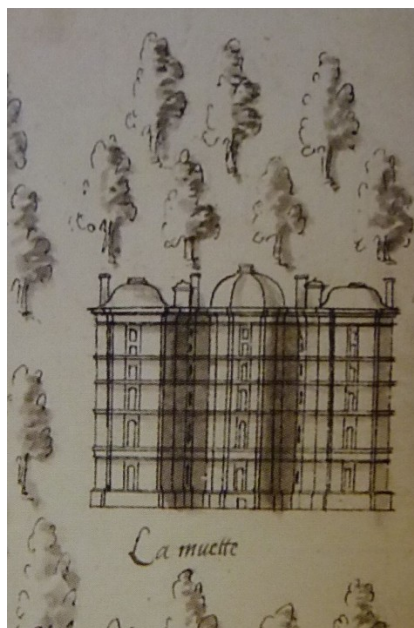
possible framework for explaining the coexistence of such contrasting stylistic models, which would link the Château de Monte-Cristo with the playful character of these picturesque buildings, which were still in vogue in the nineteenth century, as the proposals compiled in Gabriel Thouin's album confirm.⁶⁴ There are in fact other features linking this construction with the tradition of erecting pavilions in parks and gardens.⁶⁵ Apart from its small scale, both the general format and the small domes are reminiscent of the hunting lodge built for François I in the forest of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, not far from Port-Marly, and which was known as the Château de la Muette (Fig. 10b).⁶⁶

⁶³ Hugely influential, the Gothic style was accompanied from the 1840s by the revival of Renaissance and Baroque architecture, intensifying the crisis of the Classical model, which reached its climax – at around the same time as the Château de Monte-Cristo was built – with the controversy triggered by the Gothic-style project for the new church of Sainte-Clothilde in Paris (1846). This opened the way for the fusing of different styles from the past and provided the basis for eclecticism, as proposed by Hautecoeur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique en France*, vol. VI, 274-275. In fashion and painting it is also possible to detect contradictory approaches to the Baroque past, which were linked to a certain extent with the ambiguities of the political regime itself. This may be seen in old-fashioned, courtly-style stagings, such as the 1837 opening of the Galerie des Batailles de Versailles, an occasion on which Louis-Philippe dressed in the fashion of the 17th-century, wearing a wig inspired by Louis XIV, or in paintings commissioned by the king in the last years of his life, such as one showing the monarch and his sons leaving the Château de Versailles on horseback, with the equestrian statue of the Sun King in the background, painted in 1846 by Vernet. Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution*, 300-303; Marrinan, *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe*, 205.

⁶⁴ The similarity with the little palace in the print *Jardin champêtre*, with its two corner towers and the same projecting rear section, is noteworthy. Gabriel Thouin, *Plans raisonnés de toutes les espèces de jardins*, Paris 1828, pl. 21.

⁶⁵ As stated in footnote 20, Dumas included this type of garden pavilion in several of his works. Another notable example can be found in *La dame de Monsoreau* (1846), on Méridor's property, as described by Mme de Saint-Luc to her husband: "I am acquainted with the pavillon: two turrets linked one to the other by a *corps de logis* built during the reign of Louis XII. A simply delightful building." Dumas, *La dame de Monsoreau*, chapter XXII.

⁶⁶ The building, construction of which began in 1542 according to Pierre Chambiges' plans, took on its final appearance following Philibert Delorme's intervention in 1555. A detailed overview of it, complete with the floor plan, elevation and sections, can be found in a recent edition of the sumptuous volume of drawings by Du Cerceau, held at the British Museum (Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, "Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye", 1570. British Museum, Prints & Drawings, Number 1972, U.822): Françoise Boudon et Claude Mignot, *Jacques Androuet du Cerceau. Les dessins des plus excellents bâtiments de France*, Paris 2010, 94-95.



10b Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, Château de la Muette, Saint-Germain-en-Laye (reprod. from: Boudon et Mignot, *Jacques Androuet du Cerceau*, 94)

Durand the architect may well have known of this lodge and of a number of follies built in the *troubadour* style, such as the Gothic-style Château de la Reine Blanche (1825-1826) in the forest of Chantilly, commissioned by the Duc de Bourbon from Victor Dubois; the "castel" commissioned by the Comte de l'Escalopier in Montmartre (1830); or the "manoir" Beauchène in Bois de Boulogne (1835).

[31] The eclecticism of the main building at the Château de Monte-Cristo, which reflected the sheer variety of the cultural and artistic trends pursued in France in the period from 1830 to 1848 and interpreted the full range of national architectural styles, was perfectly captured by Honoré de Balzac:

*Ah! Monte Cristo is one of the most delicious follies ever built. It is the most regal sweet box there is [...]. Had you seen it, you would have been smitten with it. It is a charming villa, more beautiful than the Villa Pamphili, as it looks out over La Terrasse Saint-Germain and the water [...]. You simply cannot imagine it. It is as pretty and as beautifully embellished as the Anet gateway you saw at the École des Beaux Arts. It is well distributed. It is in short a folly from the time of Louis XV executed in the style of Louis XIII and boasting decoration from Renaissance times.*⁶⁷

[32] The decorative motifs deriving from the French Renaissance and which attracted Balzac's attention can also be associated with the legacy of the *troubadour* style, which proposed the coexistence of themes and figures

⁶⁷ Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Madame Hanska, 1845-1850*, ed. Roger Pierrot, vol. 2, Paris 1990, 943 (letter of 2 August 1848).

from the late Middle Ages with those of the early Renaissance.⁶⁸ During the July Monarchy, the popularity of this trend grew as decoration became ever more luxurious, particularly in the architecture of middle-class city residences, while the historical buildings of the first French Renaissance were recreated in the theatre sets of the time. Dumas was no doubt aware of all of this and sought to give his Port-Marly residence a certain "parfum de Renaissance",⁶⁹ which was highly appropriate in view of the works he devoted to the court of Valois.

[33] Given that Dumas was heavily involved in the production of his plays, it can be assumed that he also gave instructions on the sculpting of the decorative bas-reliefs, which were inspired by the art of the 16th and 17th centuries. There is an abundance of these decorations, and the prevalent motifs are typical of the Louis XIII era: compositions *a candelieri* with vases, fruit, flowers, tritons and dolphins; garlands with trophies and musical emblems; tendrils combined with masks and fountains; and friezes with intertwining tracery and palmettes.⁷⁰ In establishing a connection with the vogue for ambitious projects for restoring monuments, the aim of which was

⁶⁸ This can also be seen in Alexandre Lenoir's layout for the rooms of the Musée des Monuments Français, which were completed between 1793 and 1795. Questioning the traditional view that the reign of Louis XIV marked France's artistic highpoint, this reappraisal seeks to exalt François I as a patron of the arts and highlight the artistic decline that took place following the Renaissance. Janet Cox-Rearick, "Imagining the Renaissance: The Nineteenth-Century Cult of François I as Patron of Art", in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 50,1 (Spring 1997), 207-250. On the rise of François I features applied to country houses see Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Yale 1977, 81.

⁶⁹ The expression was coined by León Gozlan: "I have nothing to compare to this precious jewel, other than the Château de la Reine Blanche in the forest of Chantilly and the house of Jean Goujon in Paris. It has canted roofs, an outer balcony in stone and stained glass, windows, turrets and weathervanes, which rather indicates that it belongs to no particular period, neither to Greek art nor modern art. It has, however, a *parfum de Renaissance*, which lends it a particular charm." Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", 29-38. This allusion to Jean Goujon, together with the accounts provided by Pitre-Chevalier and Balzac, led some writers to mistakenly assume that the Château d'Anet provided the inspiration for the bas-reliefs at the Château de Monte-Cristo, a theory recently rejected by Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 53. For the possible sources and forms for Dumas' fascination on Renaissance see Claude Schopp, "Dumas et l'homme Renaissance", in: *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 64 (2012), 234-249.

⁷⁰ This type of rich, bas-relief decoration had its origin in 16th-century Italian and French architecture, see Hauteceur, *Histoire de l'architecture classique*, vol. I, 638-657, and II, 187; Jean-René Gaborit, *Sculpture française*, vol. II: Renaissance et temps modernes, Paris 1998; and Flaminia Bardati and Sabine Frommel, eds., *La réception de modèles cinquecenteschi dans la théorie et les arts français du XVIIe siècle*, Paris 2010.

to highlight the omnipresence of the past and the nation's history, Dumas invoked and reworked the historical contexts he himself chose as the backdrop for some of his most successful works, as can be seen with *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, set during the reign of Louis XIII.

[34] The use of the decorative elements of the time also provided an exquisite framework for the programme of self-glorification he had embarked on at the Château d'If, with this content reaching its climax in the Neo-Renaissance abode. The Davy de la Pailleterie coat of arms appears atop the composition formed by the staircase and main entrance, completed on this occasion with a helmet and marquis' crown and framed by the motto "j'aime qui m'aime" ("I love he who loves me") (fig. 11).⁷¹

⁷¹ This motto was not coined, as it is often believed, by Dumas himself but was used rather by the Lorraine branch of the Croÿ lineage. Charles-Philippe de Croÿ, Marquis d'Havré (†1613), had this very motto carved on the fireplace in his Château de Fontenoy-le-Château (Vosges): "J'aime qui m'aime, vive Crouy" ("I love he who loves me. Long live Crouy"). M. Durival, "Fontenoy-le-Château", in: *Description de La Lorraine et du Barrois*, vol. II, Nancy 1779, 225. Dumas had the coat of arms stamped with a marquis crown and the ornament of the weathervanes furnished with his grandfather's mottos – "Au vent la flame! Au Seigneur l'âme!" ("To the wind the flame, to God the soul"). This banishes any doubt about Dumas' wish to publicly proclaim himself the legitimate heir to the marquisate, a claim he sought to give credence to in his signature and through his writings. Given that Dumas was of mixed-race – the son of a Santo Domingo-born mulatto who was the product of the union between the plantation owner Alexandre-Antoine Davy de la Pailleterie and the black slave Céssette Du Mas or "Dumas" – it is not surprising that at the height of his career he should choose to present himself in such a proud manner. Regarding the "aristocratic chimera" Dumas pursued through these signs of ostentation, please refer to the relevant remarks in Sylvain Ledda's recent biography: *Alexandre Dumas*, Paris 2014, 242-244.



11 Château de Monte-Cristo, entrance and top detail; commissioned by Alexandre Dumas, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

[35] Protected by this latest reference to his aristocratic ancestry, Dumas gave orders for his effigy – depicted in a Neo-Baroque *cartouche* borne by two griffins – to be carved on the lintel of the main entrance. This self-regarding customisation of his residence, which, according to Léon Gozlan's account, had not initially occurred to him, was completed with the initials "A" superimposed by two intertwining "D" positioned in front of the *lucarnes* of the domes, and repeated on the park gate. In addition to this decorative flourish, and with a view to proclaiming his glory even more overtly, Dumas decided to accompany himself with portraits of other writers, all of them represented on medallions flanked by griffins on the lintels of the main windows (fig. 12).



12 Château de Monte-Cristo, portraits of writers: Dumas, above; Corneille, Homer and Lamartine, below; commissioned by Alexandre Dumas, Port-Marly, France, 1847 (photograph provided by the author)

[36] The facades of his Château de Monte-Cristo thus became a canvas for him to exhibit his canon of role models and predecessors, his own particular academy of writers, both dead and alive, perhaps as a means of atoning for his failure to gain admission to the *Académie française*.⁷² The series of portraits begins with Homer on the window above Dumas' portrait, and continues thus, in a clockwise direction, on the windows of the ground floor, with each portrait accompanied by the name of the author: "DANTE", "WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE" and "LOPE DE VEGA" on the northwestern facade, "CORNEILLE", "ESCHYLE", "VIRGILE", "GOETHE" and "EURIPIDE" on the northeastern facade, and "CASIMIR DELAVIGNE", "CHATEAUBRIAND" and "ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE" on the southeastern facade.⁷³

⁷² It is not unreasonable to see this demonstration of aristocratic pride as a response to the brutal attack Dumas had suffered shortly before when Eugène de Mirecourt wrote a well-known defamatory piece on him: *Fabrique de romans. Maison A. Dumas et Compagnie*, Paris 1845. In creating this "canvas", Dumas combined the invocation of his literary role models with the remembrance of his family and patrons. This strategy of remembrance, which Poisson labels *panthéonisation*, is also pursued in the houses of other writers, such as Lamartine's *château* in Saint-Point, in the so-called *cheminée des poètes*, which features portraits of his favourite authors, and on the hearth of the house in Guernsey where Victor Hugo lived during his exile. Poisson, *Les maisons d'écrivain*, 75. Possibly influenced by this models, in Spain, at the turn of the century Emilia Pardo Bazán included on the facade of Torres de Meirás some portraits of her favourite authors and titles of her major works. Jesús Ángel Sánchez-García, "Las Torres de Meirás. Un sueño de piedra para la quimera de Emilia Pardo Bazán", in: *Goya* 332 (July-Sept. 2010), 228-245.

[37] Original in both layout and decoration, the building was designed to exhibit Dumas' success and exquisite taste. Above all, however, its expressive resources reveal his ambitious personality and search for artistic glory. Léon Gozlan captured this connection between owner and building perfectly by describing it thus:

*a building entirely in accordance with the ideas, the tastes and the plans of Alexandre Dumas himself, who has shown that his taste as an architect is as exquisite as his talent as a writer [...]. It is the manifestation of a great spirit, of a higher artistic sensibility. It is the adorable mould of a dreamy and passionate soul.*⁷³

[38] Gozlan listed James Pradier (1790-1852), Antonin Moine (1796-1849) and Auguste Préault (1809-1879) among the artists who contributed to these reliefs and portraits, though the name of Jules Klagmann (1810-1867) should also be mentioned here. Klagmann and his disciple Ambroise Choiselet (1815-1879) had been hired for the parallel works undertaken at

⁷³ Most of these authors were proposed in a letter to his son dated December 1840, with the exception of Lope, Eschyle, Goethe, Delavigne and Chateaubriand, according to Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 347-348. The selection of portraits, a notable absentee from which is Victor Hugo – who is nevertheless wholeheartedly recommended in the aforementioned letter, along with Lamartine – would have been subject to changes and variations as construction work progressed, as some contemporaries pointed to the presence of other authors whose faces never came to be carved on the stone walls of the *château*. The accounts provided by Pitre-Chevalier and Gozlan confirm that following the opening party, which was held in July 1847, the carving of sculptures continued until early 1848. Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris. Marly-Le-Roy", 335; Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", 35-37.

⁷⁴ Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", 29-38. In the same vein, it is worth recalling a later account by Gosselin, in which he emphasises the identification of the place with Dumas: "It is at Monte-Cristo where the memory of Dumas is more alive than anywhere else, believe us. It was his creation, his thing." Gosselin, "Nos gravures. Alexandre Dumas", 294. This identification began to attract the interest of devoted admirers and visitors, as some accounts after Dumas' death confirm. In an attempt to explain the fate of the Château de Monte-Cristo, which changed hands several times, a journalist of the day described its transformation into a tourist attraction: "The garden gate rings and you run to open it, hoping to see the smiling faces of friends. You find nothing of the sort. It is either a tribe of English people, who have come to visit the celebrated writer's house, or a gang of photographers anxious to take pictures of the building beneath each of its sides and who call you a 'bourgeois pig' if you object to their plan. No matter what you do, you are an intruder in your own home. The great man pursues you day and night like Banquo's shadow: 'Dumas, what have I done to you? Balzac, what do you want from me?' It is unbearable. There is no option but to bring this ordeal to an end, sooner or later, by selling this house, one that has become a temple." Argus, "Chronique. Vente de Monte-Cristo", in: *La Semaine des familles* 15 (13 July 1872), 240.

the Théâtre-Historique, designing the striking facade, surmounted by an impressive arch and adorned with statues representing Tragedy and Comedy beside the entrance, as well as the pairs of statues of Hamlet and Ophelia and El Cid and Jimena on the main floor.⁷⁵

[39] In another demonstration of the close links between architecture and the theatrical arts, the exquisite work of these sculptors was complemented by the expertise of the stage painter Charles Séchan and his collaborators in the design of the interiors at Château de Monte-Cristo.⁷⁶ At the same time Séchan was also in charge of the architectural treatment, interior decoration and sets for the Théâtre-Historique, working throughout with Jules Diéterle and Édouard Despléchin.⁷⁷ Séchan designed the murals, decorative friezes

⁷⁵ "Théâtre Montpensier", in: *L'Illustration* 200 (26 December 1846), 263-266; and Théophile Gautier, "Feuilleton de la presse du 15 février 1847. Théâtres. Théâtre historique", in: *La Presse* (15 February 1847), 1-2. Klagmann assisted with the external reliefs for the striking *Maison Dorée* (1839) in Paris, a luxurious Renaissance-style building on which the architect Victor Lemaire and the sculptor Pierre Louis Rouillard also worked. His most acclaimed work was the fountain in Louvois Square (1839), considered at the time as "the most beautiful in Paris, without question". Anne Pinget, *La sculpture française au XIX^e siècle*, exh. cat., Paris 1986, 310-326; and Françoise Goy-Truffaut, *Paris façade. Un siècle de sculptures décoratives*, Paris 1989, 11-23.

⁷⁶ Séchan acknowledged this significant contribution in his memoirs: "I served him as an architect and interior designer, first at the Théâtre-Historique, then at his fantastic country house Monte-Cristo, near Saint-Germain." Charles Séchan, *Souvenirs d'un homme de theatre*, Paris 1883, 97. Séchan and his collaborators engaged in a series of other interior design projects, such as the house for the politician Edmond Adam in Golfe Jouan, the palace of the Sultan Abdul-Medjid in Constantinople, and several of the rooms at the casino in Baden-Baden, as related by Doin, "Charles Séchan et son atelier", 344-360.

⁷⁷ Séchan was very actively involved in the restoration and renewal of the interior decoration and sets at a number of theatres in France and elsewhere: the Odéon and the Opéra-Comique in Paris as well as theatres in Lille, Versailles, Charleville, Saint-Quentin, Calais, Douai, Moulins, Avignon, Caen, Brussels and Dresden, as related by Bellier de la Chavignerie and Auvray, *Dictionnaire général des artistes*, vol. II, 488-489. Designed by the architect Pierre-Anne de Dreux or Dedreux (1788-1849), a friend of Barthélémy Planté, the Théâtre-Historique opened on 20 February 1847, a major event on the Parisian social scene. The theatre was renamed the Théâtre Lyrique prior to its demolition in 1863. For more on the building and its history see Catherine Naugrette-Cristophe, "La fin des promenades: les bouleversements de la carte des théâtres dans le Paris du Second Empire", in: *Le théâtre dans la ville*, ed. Elie Konigson, Paris 1987 (*Les voies de la création théâtrale* 15), 107-139; Philippe Chauveau, *Les théâtres parisiens disparus, 1402-1986*, Paris 1999, 371-377; and Jean-Claude Yon, "La naissance du Théâtre-Historique", in: *Cahiers Alexandre Dumas* 35 (2008): *Le Théâtre-Historique d'Alexandre Dumas. I. Le répertoire et la troupe*, 16-44.

and tapestries for Dumas' *château* and even completed two paintings inspired by the novel *Le comte de Monte-Cristo: Le château d'If vu de nuit* and *Le port de Marseille, vu de jour*.⁷⁸ Dumas himself controlled and supervised every aspect of the interior design of the house and its overall arrangement, reinforcing the view that he was a pioneer of the subsequent development of custom-built houses in which artists could both live and work.⁷⁹ Along with buildings inspired by the Gothic and Renaissance styles, the interior design he pursued broadened the range of historic styles and reflected an aesthetic shaped by different artistic resources, one connected to the writer's life and his literary career.

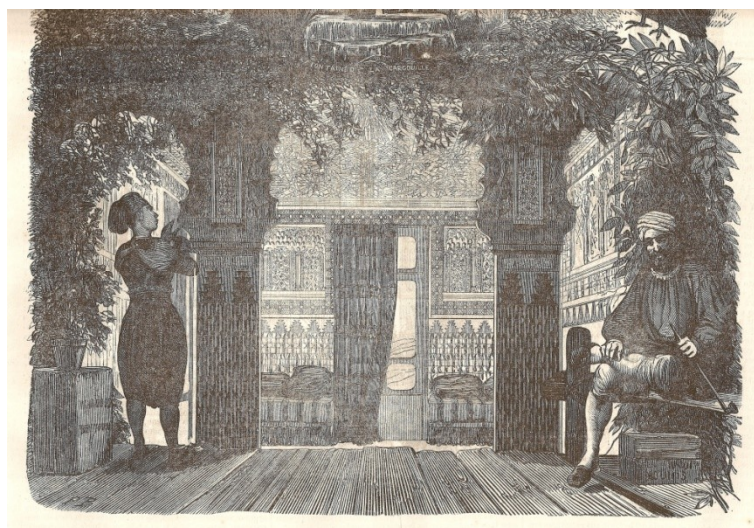
[40] The first account of the interior arrangement refers merely to a few rooms and stated that decoration work was still going on in 1848.⁸⁰ These rooms included a great hall decorated in the style of the reign of Henri II, a Renaissance-inspired dining room, a Louis XIV-style library, a Louis XV-style boudoir, a study known as the *salon perse*, the *salon cachemire*, which

⁷⁸ Alexandre Dumas, *Lettres sur le magnétisme*, Paris 1848, chapter III.

⁷⁹ Particularly the artists of the Victorian era, sculptors, painters and even photographers, as revealed in the studies devoted to the subject by Mark Girouard, "The Victorian Artist at Home, I and II", in: *Country Life* 152-153 (16 and 23 November 1972), 1278-1281 and 1370-1374; Giles Walkley, *Artist's Houses in London, 1764-1914*, Aldershot 1994, 35-159; Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain, ca. 1870-1910*, Cambridge 2003. Artists' houses attracted growing public interest during the Victorian period and were the subject of books and illustrated newspaper articles in the second half of the 19th century, some of them offering biographical sketches and interviews showing the artist in their places of residence. A fine example of just such a publication is the book by Frederic George Stephens, *Artists at Home* (London 1884), among other publications referred to in various collaborations brought together by Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart, *Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867-1897: Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts*, Farnham 2010. Similarly, Dumas' *Château de Monte-Cristo* was also the subject of newspaper reports to begin with, some of them accompanied by lithographs, such as those attributed to the aforementioned Gozlan, Barthélemy and Gosselin. Within this context of media exposure of the spaces where celebrities live and work, Dumas tapped into the fast-growing trend of customing houses, one that began in the Romantic era. In doing so he combined the outward exhibition of signs of distinction so beloved of the aristocracy with the more bourgeois concern with the internal decoration and furnishing of creative havens, as discussed in Marie-Clémence Régnier, "Le spectacle de l'homme de lettres au quotidien: De l'intérieur bourgeois à l'intérieur artiste (1840-1903)", in: *Romantisme* 168/2 (2015), 71-80.

⁸⁰ Published one month after the opening party, Pitre-Chevalier's account stated: "The apartments are small but well distributed. With the exception of the dining room and a Louis XV boudoir, all the rooms will be adorned with opulent wall coverings that Mr Dumas has brought from Spain and the East. His bedroom, meanwhile, will be bedecked with wonders befitting a sultan." Pitre-Chevalier, "Promenades aux environs de Paris", 335.

housed Dumas' arms collection, and the Moorish bedroom. Complemented by the guest rooms, these main apartments displayed a series of scenic recreations, similar to *tableaux* employed in staging plays, among which stood out the aforementioned bedroom, the so-called *chambre mauresque* or *chambre arabe* (fig. 13).



13 P.B., *Château de Monte-Cristo, Chambre mauresque*. Engraving from: *L'illustration*, 26 February 1848, 409.

[41] Following the fashionable Oriental style showcased at cafés, circuses, spas and private rooms since the 1830s,⁸¹ the bedroom also may be inspired by literature and even the theatre, as can be seen in the Moorish decoration or arcades of the Palacio de los Aragón in Zaragoza, the setting for the final act of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*. The specific idea for this Arab bedroom came to Dumas during a trip he made to Spain and Algeria in 1846 and 1847. Dumas took furniture, carpets and draperies back with him to Paris, along with two Tunisian craftsmen, a father and son, who were commissioned to decorate a room inspired by the ornamental fantasies that the writer had seen at the Alhambra in Granada and at the restored monument of King Louis IX in Carthage.⁸² Located on the second floor, the room consists of a bedroom connected to the antechamber by three horseshoe arches. The walls and ceiling of this *chambre mauresque* are covered entirely with rich and complex plasterwork featuring a combination of geometric and floral motifs, with Dumas' initials making yet another appearance. This example of Oriental inspiration completed the range of styles on view at the Château de

⁸¹ These exotic follies must be viewed within the context of a broadening of the Romantic cultural horizon. They tie in with Oriental associations found in spaces used for the purposes of leisure and pleasure, as pointed out by Claire Constans, "Les orientalistes et l'architecture", in: *Revue des monuments historiques* 125 (Feb.-March 1983), 17-24; Mignot, *Architecture of the 19th Century*, 86-89; and Marie-Jeanne Dumont, *Paris arabesques: architectures et décors arabes et orientalisants à Paris*, Paris 1988.

Monte-Cristo and was also a means for Dumas to express his admiration for the warmth of Arab hospitality, as if to make good the promise pledged by the affectionate motto *J'aime qui m'aime*. The obvious desire to invoke the pleasures and heightened sensuality of the Orient is undeniable, as Dumas sought out an idealised harem in which to enact his fantasies,⁸³ yet another manifestation of the writer's personal interest in blurring the lines that divided reality and fiction.⁸⁴

[42] In conclusion, there is more than enough evidence to indicate that the work was carried out in accordance with Dumas' taste and under his close supervision, the purpose being to create an artwork through both architecture and interior design, and thereby to reflect and affirm his personality.⁸⁵ Dumas reinforced this identification between house and owner when writing his memoirs years later, likening the house to a nest: "Every bird has his nest made of grass and feathers. And every man has his house –

⁸² Alexandre Dumas, *Le Vélote ou Tanger, Alger et Tunis*, Paris 1848, chapter XXIX. Comparing it to the Alhambra or a scene from the Arabian Nights, those who saw the room agreed on the sense of wonder it instilled, hence this account from *L'Illustration* 261 (26 February 1848), 411– "On the first floor, the Arabian room, Oriental lacework, a copy of the Alhambra, a wonder that has no equal in Paris and which the father and son conclude in typically Eastern tranquillity, one of them stern, with his white beard and honest head, the other smiling with his white teeth and bright eyes." – or Gozlan, "Le château de Monte-Cristo", 36 – "The work of this hired-out Turk [*sic*] is moulding of the like seen only in the Moorish ceilings at the Alhambra. It is a succession of cavities, in which the whole creates the effect and the illusion of lace, if ever the lace of Brussels were as light as this. I was struck with admiration. There is no single ceiling at Trianon comparable to the one the Tunisian has embroidered for Monte-Cristo."

⁸³ In the letters relating his aforementioned journey through North Africa, from November 1846 to January 1847, there is a striking absence of any mention of harems, in which Dumas appears to have shown no interest, in contrast to the abundance of observations on the way of life of the people there. The fact is that artistic incursions into this forbidden area, such as those made by his friend Delacroix a decade earlier, had made their influence felt in reinforcing the idealised view the Western world had of these sensual places. These questions are specifically discussed by Boime, *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution*, 360-368.

⁸⁴ The French writer Pierre Loti, and painters such as Frederic Leighton, Charles Cournault and Victor Madeleine were behind other 19th-century examples of erotic fantasies being transferred to artist's living spaces, as argued by Nadine Beauthéac and François Xavier-Bouchart, *L'Europe exotique*, Paris 1985; Gina Greene, "Reflections of Desire: Masculinity and Fantasy in the Fin-de-Siècle Luxury Brothel", in: *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 7,1 (spring 2008), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring08/108-reflections-of-desire-masculinity-and-fantasy-in-the-fin-de-siecle-luxury-brothel> (accessed 10 April 2012); and Jason Edwards, "The Lessons of Leighton House: Aesthetics, Politics, Erotics", in: *Rethinking the Interior*, 85-110.

should he have a house, that is – suited to his character, his temperament, his fantasy."⁸⁶

[43] Thanks to his talent as a stage director, Dumas drew on his passion for the theatre and his broad experience in staging his plays in developing the expressive possibilities of architecture and interior design to their full potential. Descriptive elements such as texts and figures were combined with diverse stylistic borrowings in order to create a personal setting. With the exception of his Oriental fantasy, this was all orchestrated in aesthetic terms according to the same successful formula: that of using national history as a framework, the *couleur française* that the writer proudly considered one of the most valuable assets of his literary output.⁸⁷ By means of a series of surprises that extend to the interiors of his magnificent *château*, Dumas gave the most appropriate dramatic effects prominence over historic faithfulness in attracting and fixing the attention of the visitor on the display he staged at both buildings at Port-Marly. While Goethe praised Dumas' *Henri III et sa cour* by saying it was a play "made for the eyes",⁸⁸ at the Château de Monte-Cristo Dumas created buildings intended to captivate people and catch their eye. The Château de Monte-Cristo can thus be seen as a landmark in Dumas' life, constituting as it did an architectural celebration of his successful literary and dramatic career, and a reflection of his intense creativity and love of life.

The curtain rises ... and then falls

[44] Dumas was at pains to make clear that everything at the Château the Monte-Cristo had been envisaged and laid out for his audience and his audience only, whose understanding he often appealed to during the

⁸⁵ This is the view held when Dumas was at the peak of his success. Three years before Eugène Sue started to receive criticism for his lifestyle, Mirecourt scoffed at the interior design and furniture to be found at the Château de Monte-Cristo: "The main sitting room, adorned with golden, silk wall hangings, contained all sorts of artistic wonders, while the private lounge, or boudoir, had immense pieces of cashmere for curtains. It was a jumble of pictures, statues, Boulle furniture and bizarre oddities, all thrown together pell-mell from the ground floor to the eaves. There was a surfeit of sculptures and a profusion of mouldings. In the absence of taste, ostentation reigned supreme." Eugène de Mirecourt, *Les contemporains. Alexandre Dumas*, Paris 1856, 78.

⁸⁶ Dumas, *Mes mémoires*, chapter CXVI. This reference to the concordance between the house and his personal fantasies must be viewed in the light of Dumas' attempt to find other non-literary means of expression that tied in with the Romantic concept of the "correspondence of the arts", a concept which he himself championed: "Each man of art has in a neighbouring art form a counterpart who stands alongside him." On the implementation of these ideas on domestic interiors intimately linked to writers, and the role of the press in the dissemination of these complex scenographies see Marie-Clémence Régner, "Le spectacle de l'homme de lettres au quotidien", 71-80.

building's construction, when he had a sign saying: "Le public n'entre pas ici" ("No audience allowed") erected at the entrance to his property.⁸⁹ Welcomed with open arms by a writer at the height of his fame, it was an audience that flocked to the house-warming party he threw at his new *château* on 25 July 1847, a reception attended by almost 600 people.⁹⁰ This opening was nothing less than a *première*, with Dumas starring in his own play as a guide and interpreter revealing to his friends the core concepts and meanings underlying the facades of his lavish abode.

[45] Although the Château de Monte-Cristo would remain under construction for a little time following this triumphant opening, it was at last able to fulfil its function of reconciling the frenetic social life of its owner with his no-less-frenetic pace of work. It finally took on its long-intended dimension as a

⁸⁷ Although none of its main characters are depicted anywhere, some of the ingredients in the success of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844), such as the ability to create surprise and emotion or the skilful plot management, are highly appropriate to the study of the visual strategies displayed at Port-Marly. For a discussion of Dumas' freely expressive and original interpretations of French history see Charles Grivel, "Alexandre Dumas, une écriture de l'histoire", in: *Alexandre Dumas, une lecture de l'histoire*, ed. Michel Arrous, Paris 2003, 461-475; and Isabelle Durand-Le Guern, "Alexandre Dumas", in: *La fabrique du Moyen Âge au XIX^e siècle. Représentations du Moyen Âge dans la culture et la littérature françaises du XIX^e siècle*, eds. Simone Bernard-Griffiths, Pierre Glaudes and Bertrand Vibert, Paris 2006, 823-829. Louis Barron discusses the presence of elements of wonder drawn from Dumas' imagination for the purpose of seducing his readers: "Monte-Cristo is nothing but a house of pleasure, a very pleasing house possessing a Romantic and Renaissance style, built by the amiable Alexandre Dumas, at a time of wealth, of good humour and lavish dreams, and utterly appropriate to the fantasy of the agreeable tales of Queen Margot and the Dame de Monsoreau." See Louis Barron, *Les fleuves de France. La Seine*, Paris 1904, 314; and Julie Anselmini, *Le Roman d'Alexandre Dumas père, où la reinvention du merveilleux*, Geneva 2010.

⁸⁸ According to Goethe's words, recorded by Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations de Goethe pendant les dernières années de sa vie: 1822-1832*, vol. II, Paris 1863, 249; and also commented upon by Marie-Antoinette Allevy, *Édition critique d'une mise en scène romantique. Indications générales pour la mise en scène de 'Henri III et sa cour' par Albertin* [1938], reprinted in id., *La mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle. Édition critique d'une mise en scène romantique*, Geneva 1976, 7.

⁸⁹ "Monte-Cristo", 411; and Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 25.

⁹⁰ The news of the grandeur of the *château*, which spread by word of mouth and was reported on eagerly by the press, raised expectations similar to those generated a few months earlier by the opening of the Théâtre-Historique, on 20 February 1847, as evidenced by contemporary accounts collated by Poisson, *Monte-Cristo*, 53; Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 383; and Cazenave, *Alexandre Dumas, le château des folies*, 38-43.

creative refuge at around the same time, on 18 October 1847 to be precise, when, locked away in his Château d'If, Dumas began writing *Mes mémoires*, as if aware that a part of his life were coming to a close with those heady days of success.⁹¹ Shortly afterwards, following the 1848 Revolution and the end of Louis-Philippe's regime, theatre audiences began to dwindle and Dumas fell into bankruptcy, a turn of events caused by the failure of the Théâtre-Historique, for which he was held legally responsible. Mounting debts and an unsustainable lifestyle led to the seizure of the Château de Monte-Cristo, which was auctioned off in May of that year, complete with all its furniture and objets d'art, although Dumas managed to buy himself enough time to continue living there until his departure for Brussels in December 1852. The last few seasons spent at Port-Marly thus gave the writer the opportunity to cast his mind back, while the resonance of his aesthetic portrait led him to look into the mirror and ponder the meaning of his life.

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⁹¹ The Théâtre-Historique and the Château de Monte-Cristo both opened in 1847, the year regarded as the high point of Dumas' career, in terms of his success and recognition, as stated by Schopp, *Alexandre Dumas*, 412-413.